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The Great Gesture

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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GOVERNOR HARDY.

The Great Gesture

BY

HAMISH BLAIR

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NOTE.

THIS story was written several months before the announcement of the American Moratorium.

The Great Gesture.

CHAPTER ONE.

I.

ON the first night out from Bombay in the early March of 1941, a select Anglo-American group had defined itself after dinner on the promenade deck of the P. & O. *Corona*. So select indeed that it might almost be described as a Scoto-American group. It consisted firstly of John G. Reinhart and his daughter, Sadie; secondly of Robert Hamilton, I.C.S. John G. Reinhart was, of course, a millionaire from Chicago. Robert Hamilton was equally, of course, a Scot from the Strath of Clyde.

Sadie was less a matter of course than either of the men. She had her share of young America's heritage of good looks, and was turned out with the expensive simplicity which belongs, as of

right, to the American woman who is blessed alike with money and good taste. But whereas looking first at her father and then at Sadie, you would have expected her pretty lips to open on you in American, she spoke the King's English as though she had lived much in Britain—as in fact she had.

Not that John G. Reinhart was in any way unworthy of his elegant daughter to look at. Tall, well-groomed and clean-shaven, he carried his iron-grey head like the President of a University, nor was his speech aggressive. But the successful Yankee was written all over him. You could not possibly mistake him for anything else.

Robert Hamilton in his way was also a type. As to appearance you will find his congeners in dozens of offices in Glasgow and the Dominions—a long head, a square jaw, a nose that just misses the *retroussé*, level black eyebrows with steady grey eyes beneath them, a clipped black moustache of the same hue as the thick crop of hair. Quiet efficiency stamped upon him, and resolution tempered by good humour. At twenty-eight he was taking his first spell of home leave after putting in six years' service mostly on the plains, but latterly in the Secretariat, for the reason that the Government had its eye

upon him as a useful man to have at headquarters. In short, Robert Hamilton, a native of Milngavie, which sounds better than Glasgow, where he had been largely educated, was a promising member of the Indian Civil Service, that *corps d'élite* among the services of all the world.

The little group had come together with the casual ease attaching to shipboard acquaintanceships. Mr Reinhart and his daughter had spent the last three months touring India. They had been well received everywhere, and by everyone from the Viceroy downwards; and they were now on their way to Europe, purposing to stay in London for the season. The three had found themselves together at lunch, and had discovered a mutual liking for each other; and when the tables were being settled for the voyage Mr Reinhart had invited Hamilton to sit with them at a table for three.

II.

With her father on one side and Robert Hamilton on the other Sadie had quite enjoyed her first dinner on the homeward voyage. The three talked together like old friends who had

met after a long separation. Or rather the men talked and Sadie was largely content to display her talent for listening—an uncommon talent considering her sex and nationality. Or still rather Mr Reinhart talked, and Hamilton seconded him.

The conversation ran mainly on public affairs. Father and daughter were full of India, which they had 'done' with a certain amount of thoroughness. Mr Reinhart was enthusiastic over the administration.

"We came straight to India from the Philippines," he said, "and from what we saw and from what General Milligan told me, the problem there is just as much as we can tackle. The way you people are dealing with the much more complicated problem of India is amazing."

"Then you still have a military man in charge of the Philippines?" asked Hamilton.

"Yes, sir, and from appearances we shall have a military Governor-General there for another half a century. Now here is India—or rather here was India, for we have now left India behind us—"

"Not quite, Mr Reinhart. Technically you are in India until we have passed Aden."

"Wonderful, wonderful," murmured the American. "So even that huge sub-continent

doesn't give you sufficient scope for your energies. You English are a wonderful race."

"I'm sorry to disappoint you," answered Hamilton, "but I don't happen to be English."

"I know—you're Scotch, of course," struck in Sadie. "Your name shows it, though your speech doesn't."

"Nor, if I may say so, is your speech American, Miss Reinhart."

"Oh, that is easily explained," she answered. "My mother was English, and I was sent to school in England at the age of ten. I have had ten years in England and the Continent. I have spent half my life—nearly—in Europe."

Hamilton looked at her admiringly, and put her down at twenty-one. Her style was American, but her colouring was English—a small head, with long fair hair coiled on a lovely neck; graceful shoulders and the figure of a Hebe; blue eyes that smiled kindly on the world—eyes that could hardly help being kind, he thought. Later on he was to think otherwise—but why anticipate?

They lit up now with girlish amusement as her father cleared his throat and began—

"Mr Hamilton, I should like to have your views on—"

He got no further.

"I know what you're going to say, father," Sadie interrupted. "You're going to ask Mr Hamilton why the Americans are so much disliked in Europe. And I'm not going to let you. It's much too controversial a subject for the dinner-table, isn't it, Mr Hamilton? And in any case we've finished dinner, so I vote for drinking our coffee upstairs."

Hamilton possessed himself of her silk scarf as she led the way to the lift.

"You mustn't say 'upstairs,'" he murmured as she passed him. "Not on a British ship at least."

Sadie smiled delightfully.

"I'm dying to learn the right technical terms," she said. "The British are so much at home at sea, aren't they?"

"'Below' for 'downstairs'; 'aloft' or 'on deck' for 'upstairs,'" he replied. "Never forget that, and no one will ever take you for anything but an Englishwoman."

They packed themselves into the lift and shot upwards. It was their fate apparently to be left to themselves that evening. The trio just filled the lift.

"But who wants to be taken for an English-

woman?" she countered. "I'm proud to be an American, whatever the world may say about us."

"Admir-r-able!" exclaimed Hamilton, as they stepped out into the companion.

Sadie turned round on him with a whimsical look.

"Now you are betraying yourself," she said. "No Englishman ever trills his r's like that."

"Yes, murder will out. The moment a Scot gets excited he discovers himself."

"Why, what is there to get excited about?"

"There's the coming rough-and-tumble to get your coffee," he replied, pointing to the crowd which surrounded the coffee steward. "And there's the problem of commandeering the best place to sit in afterwards. To say nothing of the controversy which I can see your father is determined to force on me."

She sat down near a ventilator.

"Yes," she agreed, "nothing on earth will stop dad from bringing it up. But don't be nervous—you'll find him very reasonable, in spite of some unpleasant happenings. Thank you so much, Mr Hamilton. Yes, I'll have milk and sugar, please."

III.

Having drunk their coffee in the handsome companion, they paced up and down on the cool side of the promenade deck. Eventually they dragged their chairs to the taffrail, and sank into them with the satisfaction that follows exertion of any kind in the tropics. The two men continued to smoke. Sadie refrained. She was like the man who had never played the violin, she said. She did not know whether she liked smoking or not, for she had never tried. An admission of which Hamilton—smoker though he was—approved unstintedly. It was quite right, of course, that women should smoke if they wanted to—but he somehow liked them better when they did not. And the fact that she did not smoke fitted in with the old-world atmosphere that seemed to cling to Sadie. It chimed with her sweet expression and the coils of fair hair that adorned her slender neck.

“I think this is ever so much pleasanter than flying,” she said as they settled themselves. “Don’t you think so, Mr Hamilton?”

“Yes, it’s more comfortable and more leisurely,” he admitted. “And it’s an advantage not to be separated from your impedimenta.”

"But," said Mr Reinhart, "I thought you people couldn't travel homewards quick enough. The air mail gives you two or three weeks longer in Europe, don't it?"

"That is so, but I haven't got to that stage yet."

"What stage, Mr Hamilton?" asked Sadie.

"Well, you see, I am unmarried, and the only relative I know of is a maiden aunt who lives near Glasgow. Consequently I have no inducement to hurry home; and as I have eight months' leave to play with—and as the sea voyage is cheaper—here I am. All the more pleased with myself to have struck so comfortable a ship and such pleasant travelling companions."

"Then," said Sadie, with a mischievous glance at her father, "you don't share the general prejudice against Americans?"

"If I ever have, Miss Reinhart, I abjure it from this day forward."

"But you have felt it," said her father. "Now this is a subject that interests me enormously from a whole range of viewpoints, and I discuss it whenever I can with as many people as I meet. Tell me, Mr Hamilton, why there is this strong anti-American sentiment everywhere?"

"Surely," fenced the young man, "you must know more about it by this time than I can possibly tell you?"

"I have heard an amazing variety of viewpoints, sir. Everyone seems to have a different reason for a phenomenon as to the actuality of which everybody is agreed. From a man of your ability, Mr Hamilton, I expect to hear something of value to myself and my countrymen. And I want to say right here that you needn't be afraid of speaking your mind straight out. I am one hundred per cent American and so is little Sadie here, but I have knocked around the world for twenty years and I know that the United States isn't the only nation in it. No, sir—not by a mighty long way. And I will be grateful for any light you can throw on this subject, which, let me remind you, is a matter of importance not only to us Americans but to the whole world."

Hamilton lit a cigarette in the middle of a pause which he felt to be awkward. A glance at the daughter reassured him that for her the moment was not in the least a tense one, and Mr Reinhart's appeal had a likeable ring of genuineness about it. Both of them were evidently waiting patiently for him to speak.

"Mr Reinhart," he said slowly—his manner of speaking was habitually deliberate—"I agree with you that it is an important matter, and if I can throw any light upon it I shall be happy

to do so. In my opinion the general unpopularity of America is very largely due to envy."

"Go on," said the other.

"Envy is the meanest and most unreasonable of all the passions," Hamilton continued. "The nations of Europe are, of course, in a bad way economically and financially—they are in fact in a desperate way. The Great War of 1914-1918 has ruined them. With the exception of France they have never recovered from the strain. So far indeed from recovering, every effort they make to free themselves only plunges them deeper in the morass."

"I agree with every word you say. Europe is more or less ruined."

"Now look at the other picture. America has prospered ever since the war as no nation has ever prospered before. There was a slight set-back from 1929 to 1931, but that was a mere incident, and only made her stronger and richer than ever. America holds the rest of the world in fee. She has two-thirds of all the gold, she receives enormous tribute even now from all the countries in Europe, her mass production enables her to dump hundreds of millions worth of goods into every other country at prices which cut out local competition; and then having drawn away all their wealth by underselling

and financial pressure, she adds insult to injury by flinging back a portion of it through the tips and purchases of her tourist invaders. Naturally Europe cherishes envy, hatred and malice and all uncharitableness against a country that is so powerful, so wealthy, so prosperous——”

“And so ruthless a creditor?” interrupted Mr Reinhart, with quiet and deliberate emphasis.

Hamilton turned in his chair to look at him. The American's clear-cut face showed serious, even solemn, in the moonlight.

“Well, yes, there is that, too,” he continued. “America has taken six hundred millions sterling from Britain alone during the past twenty years, and from the rest of Europe in proportion. But we Britishers don't talk of that because we have agreed to pay America a thousand millions. It was a mad blunder of the British negotiator, but we endorsed it and we must abide by it. If the United States spontaneously wrote off the balance that would be a different thing. But we can't grouse because you hold us to our bargain.”

“Don't say 'you,'" said Mr Reinhart, moving restively in his seat. “I have had nothing to do with it. I have contended in season and out of season that the American attitude in this matter is indefensible. We were by far

the richest country in the world and we had fought less and suffered less than any other nation. The least we could have done was to shoulder the financial burden. We would hardly have felt it, while it is crushing the other nations."

"Ah!" exclaimed Hamilton. "You are one of the generous Americans. It is a pity there weren't more of your sort twenty years ago when the British Debt was settled. But if anything is quite certain, it is that the United States will demand its pound of flesh—and get it."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Mr Reinhart.

"Well, of course, you know your own countrymen. But personally I have always felt that the British are in no position to judge them. After all, you stand to-day where we stood a century and a half ago. You are the richest people on earth, and you are more or less isolated from the hurly-burly of European politics. The Atlantic is to you what the Channel was to us. Naturally you look at our troubles with the dispassionate temper which we displayed in the days when we ourselves were independent of Europe—and when we had the money to maintain our independence. The peoples of Europe said the same things about us then that they are saying about you now—if that is any consolation to you."

"There is a very important difference, Mr Hamilton."

"And that is——"

"The United States of Europe."

Hamilton was silent. Yes, by Jove, that did make a difference!

"If Europe could have combined a century ago as it is combining to-day," Mr Reinhart went on, "we should have heard a deal less about British predominance and the balance of power. As it is, Europe is getting into a position to make America sit up. And I can only hope, sir, that when the tussle comes Great Britain will treat us better than we have treated Great Britain."

Just then the deck steward appeared. He was handing round to passengers the latest wireless bulletin which had been issued from the ship's press. Mr Reinhart reached out for a slip and handed it to Sadie.

"Your eyes are better than mine," he said. "Tell us what there is—if there is anything worth telling."

Sadie glanced down the column, and Hamilton, studying her, marked a sudden access of gravity which made the young face look almost severe. Her father, who was not studying her, missed it.

" Well, little woman, is there anything in the news ? " he asked mildly.

Sadie handed the bulletin to Hamilton.

" Will you read it out ? " she said, and their eyes met.

He took it, and the first caption which encountered his gaze was—

" VOLSCIA JOINS THE U.S. OF EUROPE."

CHAPTER TWO.

I.

WHILE the *Corona* ploughs its way across the Arabian Sea towards Aden, it may be of interest to summarise the international situation in the early part of 1941. It may be said to have been dominated by two factors.

First of all, the United States of Europe. Originally proposed by Aristide Briand in 1930, this confederacy had taken ten years to hammer into shape. Its final constitution established a system of mutual free trade among its twenty-eight members, and bound them to come to each other's assistance in the event of any attack on the part of a non-European Power, provided that the non-European Power was the aggressor. Should a member of the United States of Europe itself be the aggressor, the other members were at liberty to remain neutral or to assist it, but not, by implication, to take sides against it.

For many years the important State of Volscia had remained outside the confederation. Jealousy of France had been the stumbling-block, but this difficulty had now been got over, and in March 1941 Volscia had been formally enrolled as a member of the United States of Europe.

It is worth while noting the circumstances under which she came in. For the best part of twenty years—in fact, ever since the close of the Great War—Volscia had displayed an animus of special bitterness against America. This feeling arose partly from her state of indebtedness to that country, but only partly. After all, every European belligerent was in debt to America. Volscia's special grievance against the Americans was their contemptuous treatment of her during and immediately after the war. The Volscians had long been sensitive on the subject of their international status, and America, in lending them aid, had flung it to them as a rich man flings a coin to a roadside beggar. Volscia never forgot or forgave this insult (real or fancied is immaterial to the purpose of this narrative), and under her formidable Dictator, Martin Andreas, bided her time for revenge.

Her main grievance against the United States of Europe was that it was not sufficiently anti-American. Growing up under the shadow of the

League of Nations, the new confederacy had at first been strongly influenced by the pacific bias of that body. Hence it had originally steered clear of any tendency to embroilment with America or any other non-European combination. But the growing hostility towards America which was generally felt throughout Europe gradually weaned it from its early allegiance to the League of Nations. Eventually the United States of Europe emerged as a separate entity, with an economic policy which was bound to bring it into collision with the great Transatlantic republic. This point had been arrived at just as the present narrative opens. The last of Volscia's objections to the United States of Europe now disappeared, and her immediate adherence to the confederacy was universally recognised—and nowhere more clearly than at Washington—as an earnest that an aggressive policy would speedily be declared.

II.

These considerations lead up to the second main factor in the world situation—the growing isolation of the other United States, the United States of America. This development had begun immediately after the close of the Great War,

and had gone on steadily for twenty years. Its main occasion, as Mr Reinhart had acknowledged to Robert Hamilton, was America's treatment of the European nations which had beaten the Austro-German alliance. The U.S.A., gorged with wealth, and hardly blooded in the struggle, had demanded from an exhausted and impoverished Europe repayment of all the money it had lent its coadjutors, and had (so they complained, all except Britain) drained them dry. Add to this the constant irritation of the American boast that "We won the war," and the further irritant set up by the stream of prosperous Americans which poured into Europe every summer, flaunting their wealth (or so it seemed) in the eyes of envious and struggling nations.

Robert Hamilton put his finger upon another of their offences when he instanced the underselling of their European competitors in the European market. Everyone knew that Volscia's accession to the United States of Europe meant the inauguration of a desperate tariff war between the two great confederacies.

America's chief crime against the prosperity of Europe has yet to be mentioned. Ten years before her fiscal and financial policy combined had drawn half the world's gold supply into her strong rooms. Steady persistence in this policy

had increased her holding of the world's gold to two-thirds by 1941. One result of this monopoly was a steady fall in prices, which hit the rest of the world much more than America. America had resources such as no other country possessed. Protest after protest had been made on behalf of the other nations, but had been ignored. The exasperation provoked by this attitude was even greater than that caused by America's insistence upon repayment of war debts. Compared to it even the reversal of the Monroe Doctrine was a trifling offence.

The principle originally laid down by President Monroe was that the United States of America would suffer no European Power to interfere in the affairs of either North or South America. At the same time it bound the United States of America to refrain from interference in Europe or Asia. The second part of the Monroe Doctrine went by the board when America seized the Philippines and participated in the Great War. One of the numerous complaints against America was that while ignoring the Monroe Doctrine in so far as it prevented her from interfering in Europe, she jealously maintained it in so far as it kept both the Americas a close Yankee preserve. This complaint was, of course, unreasonable ; but it was symptomatic of the general inflammation of European feeling where America was con-

cerned. A cheerful outlook for the League of Nations and the peace of the world !

The isolation of North America from the rest of the world was emphasised by the growing restiveness of South America under the domination of the North. Financially as well as politically North America had Latin America in leading strings. Her powerful Navy pervaded American waters, and was ready at the smallest provocation to assert the claim of Washington to dictate not only the external but the domestic policy of the largest or smallest republic. This claim was never asserted in internal affairs so long as the local government was subservient to the Northern States. The general effect of Washington's attitude, however, had been to reduce Latin America to complete subordination. The Southern republics submitted with an ill grace, because they saw no feasible alternative ; but their quiescence was that of the half-tamed tiger in a circus rather than of the purring feline on the hearth-rug.

III.

Between these two gigantic systems and their growing antagonisms Greater Britain occupied a status of uneasy neutrality. The British king-

dom had been the strongest advocate for the affiliation of the United States of Europe to the League of Nations. Bound to the United States of America by sentiments of kinship and by a political tradition reaching back over a century, Britain had sensed that any divorce between the United States of Europe and the League of Nations must lead eventually to a ruinous clash with the United States of America. Therefore she had striven to the utmost to preserve the original link between them, for she also saw that its dissolution meant the collapse of the League.

Her fears were eventually justified, and her policy came to naught. The United States of Europe broke away from the League, which had thereupon gone into liquidation ; and it was obvious that upon the admission of Volscia the Europe-America crisis could not long be delayed.

Obviously, however, it was impossible for Great Britain to hold entirely aloof from the European confederacy. Its free trade policy gave her enormous advantages, and promised to do much to revive her languishing industries. Further, it was obvious that to stand out would have invited the general hostility of Europe ; and lastly, by joining the United States, she might hope to exercise a restraining influence in the interests of the world's peace.

The British Dominions also occupied an anomalous position. They were Protectionist to a man, and Canada, and in a lesser degree Australia, had cultural and commercial affinities with America. The United States of Europe had no meaning for them, except as Europe's larger economic freedom connoted a brisker demand for Dominion products. Their sympathies lay with America rather than with Europe.

To round off the anomalies of the general situation, India, which enjoyed fiscal independence, had concluded a treaty with Japan, whereby reciprocal Free Trade had been set up between these two countries, with Protection against the rest of the world. On her part Japan shared in the general anti-American sentiment to the full, and held herself in readiness to seize upon any chance of gratifying it which world developments might throw in her way.

On the flank of the Indo-Japanese group stood the Russo-Chinese Alliance—a vast dim menace to civilisation.

CHAPTER THREE.

I.

SHIPBOARD friendships are proverbially evanescent, but Robert Hamilton had no reason to complain of the attitude of Mr Reinhart and his daughter when they met again in London a month or two after the voyage on the *Corona*. Before the three parted at Marseilles, they had made him promise to call on them in London at the Ritz. He did so, wondering, with youthful cynicism, whether they would remember or receive him. He soon found that Americans are not apt to forget. Both father and daughter were obviously delighted to renew his acquaintance. He dined with them within the week in their sumptuous private suite—a perfect dinner, which Sadie spoke of as "almost a family party." When she told him of the other guests, he wondered what one of her more formal dinners would be like.

First of all there were the American Ambassador, his wife and daughter—Mr and Mrs Erasmus R. Brinsmead and Mary. There were also the Hon. Eric Wheeler, M.P., and his sister, the Hon. Joan Wheeler. Their father, as Hamilton did not need to be informed, was Lord Olney ; and he also knew that Eric Wheeler was a rising politician and Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. It appeared that Joan Wheeler and Sadie Reinhart had been schoolfellows, and Eric and Sadie had known each other for some time. Rather a blow for a poor Indian Civilian ! Hamilton conceived a violent dislike for Eric Wheeler on the spot.

The remaining guests were United States Senator Bryan S. Westerhout and his wife.

“ Old friends of father’s, who only arrived in England to-day,” said Sadie to Hamilton (the first to arrive), as she named Mr and Mrs Westerhout. “ They are staying in the hotel and are perfect dears ; but the Senator is *enfant terrible* as a politician, and I know father is praying that the presence of the Ambassador will keep him quiet, especially as Eric Wheeler is coming.”

“ Yes, Sadie,” said her father, “ I wish it had been possible to avoid having them on the same night.”

“ Any international complications likely to

arise?" inquired Hamilton. He felt strongly inclined, somehow, to sneer at Eric Wheeler.

"Oh, Eric is terribly brainy, you know," replied Sadie. "He is just wonderful at leading people on to talk and then getting information from them."

Hamilton's heart sank still lower. He had, of course, no business to be struck by Sadie, who was so frightfully rich and moved in such exalted circles. But he had been, and to know that she on her part had evidently been struck by a rising politician whose father was in the House of Lords seemed to take all the savour out of life. He felt less and less inclined to love Eric Wheeler.

His spirits rose slightly when Wheeler and his sister appeared. The Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs could not possibly be described as handsome. Still less did he look the part of a clever man. He was of middle height, stocky in figure, with rebellious fair hair falling over his forehead, pale blue eyes which shone through thick spectacles, a wide mouth, prominent teeth, and a chin which had just been arrested in the act of retreating. His smile as he was introduced seemed to Hamilton to be fatuous, and his voice was so high-pitched as to be almost falsetto. He was nearer thirty-five than thirty.

His sister was at least a dozen years his junior,

and this left her a year or two older than Sadie. Joan Wheeler was a small but attractive blonde, with a piquant nose and a mouth which slightly resembled her brother's, but was less aggressively plain.

The two girls kissed ; a pretty picture, thought Hamilton, though he grudged every gesture which seemed to bring Wheeler and Sadie closer together. He tried to console himself with the reflection that Sadie could not possibly have fallen in love with a fellow whose eyes bulged, whose teeth protruded, and whose voice was like a horse's whinny. Then he remembered Wheeler's brilliant reputation, and again he was smitten with misgivings. Sadie, he told himself, was just the kind of girl to overlook these physical peculiarities and to admire a man for his mental qualities.

Next came Senator and Mrs Westerhout ; he stout, Dutch-built and sixty-five, with a shock of white hair which made him look like a roused cockatoo ; she only a little younger, but faded and commonplace. A dull epilogue to a story which had begun with any amount of sparkle and vivacity nearly fifty years before.

The last to be announced were the American Ambassador and his family.

Mr Brinsmead looked his part—tall, dignified and handsome in the stereotyped way that makes

so many Americans look alike. He was clean shaven. His broad forehead was crowned with a head of thick grizzling hair. It was a kindly serene face ; only the lines about the mouth and eyes told of past struggles and possibly of grievous wounds. His wife was a well-preserved woman of forty or so, with glossy and abundant hair of a rich brown without a streak of grey. Mary Brinsmead was not yet twenty, but was already a beauty who was both noticed and admired. She had her mother's colouring and the same rich hair, her father's height and her own graceful carriage. Even though he felt himself to be on the verge of a hopeless attachment for Sadie, Hamilton's candour obliged him to admit that Mary Brinsmead was decidedly the more beautiful of the two.

There was no osculation this time between the young hostess and her guests. Not that Mary Brinsmead had the least desire to stand on her father's dignity. She had enough of her own. But she had not been at school with Sadie.

II.

The dinner was as good as the best hotel cuisine could make it, helped out with the most expensive wines. The Eighteenth Amendment had, of

course, been repealed some five years previously ; it was no longer bad taste to offer alcohol to the American Ambassador. As it happened, both Mr and Mrs Brinsmead were abstainers. Their daughter was not.

Seated between Joan Wheeler and Mrs Westerhout, Hamilton spent a not unhappy hour and a half. If he had been placed at a distance from Sadie, so, he noted, had Eric Wheeler ; besides, it was inevitable. The Ambassador had to be on her right hand and the Senator on her left. Joan Wheeler was a nice girl—very different from Sadie, of course, but entirely unaffected and not without ideas. But he found Mrs Westerhout far more amusing. She was a genial cynic ; she had no illusions left. But she had seen much of the world, and was a keen and humorous observer. Her comments on men and things had a tang which at first was distinctly enjoyable.

While he neglected neither of his fair neighbours, Hamilton paid keen attention to Eric Wheeler, who was seated opposite him. From his demeanour and the scraps of conversation which were wafted across the table, he felt more and more puzzled at the reputation which Wheeler had acquired. His talk seemed quite ordinary, and his high whinnying laugh detracted still further from its dignity. Hamilton somehow grew

more cheerful as he listened to him. Surely Sadie could not care seriously for such an ass?

Wheeler was seated between Mrs Brinsmead and her daughter, and was evidently keeping them both amused by his irresponsible chatter. At one point, however, the Ambassador addressed him direct, and Hamilton noticed an immediate and remarkable change in him. The wide mouth closed, the grin disappeared, and the whole face became watchful and intent. Wheeler, then, had two totally different manners—one for social and the other for business purposes. The neighing laugh and the frivolous air must be more or less put on. Hamilton became conscious of a growing respect.

As the meal progressed the reason for this assumption began to dawn on him. Senator Westerhout was spoiling for a fight, and was making repeated efforts to engage the Under-Secretary, even talking to him across Miss Brinsmead. But Wheeler used the girl as a shield without the least compunction; and when the determined Senator made to wave her aside in order to get at him, he turned to the mother and sent her into fits of laughter. Mrs Brinsmead's amusement was only partially the result of his wit; she knew perfectly well that he was clinging to her as a refuge from the senatorial

attack. Probably the only person at the table who did not tumble to the little comedy was Joan Wheeler.

III.

At last the ladies withdrew, and the senatorial onset could no longer be stalled. Wheeler could not even plead the House of Commons as an excuse for flight, for earlier in the evening he had patted himself publicly on the back because there had been a count out. He threw a look of comic resignation at Hamilton as the Senator promptly moved into Miss Brinsmead's chair. Hamilton had already begun to like him, and besides they were the only Britons in the room. It was also possible that there was nothing between Sadie and him. In any case he might easily be a good fellow.

Mr Reinhart came round the table to join the Ambassador, and for a minute or two they conversed on neutral topics. But it was impossible to keep up the pretence for long. Senator Westerhout's penetrating tones were habitually pitched as though he were addressing a public meeting. Now that the ladies were gone, his voice searched the room. True, Mr Reinhart and the Ambassador had been spared his opening observations, but

they were well able to fill them in from imagination. Hamilton was a spectator from the beginning, which was fairly stereotyped.

Mr Westerhout expressed himself as delighted to meet Mr Wheeler, who had apparently gained a great reputation at Washington.

"It takes a lot to please the Senate of the United States, Mr Wheeler," he said, "but I want to tell you that most of us—I speak, of course, for the Republican majority—have a real admiration for your handling of the three small disputes that came up for settlement last year. We hope that you and Lord Rotherham will long continue to direct the British Foreign Office."

"Lord Rotherham, I am sure, will be delighted to hear you say so," answered Wheeler.

"I hope to have the opportunity of telling his lordship myself, sir. In fact, Mr Wheeler, I have come to England especially to see you and other British statesmen on the world situation which is now developing so rapidly. As you know, the Senate handles the foreign policy of the United States—"

"Of America, Senator," put in Wheeler, with a genial glance at the rest of the company.

"Of America, Mr Wheeler," rejoined Mr Westerhout. "I thank you, sir, for correcting me, and I take your timely correction as the starting-

point of what I am about to say. As you have justly reminded me, the United States of America is now confronted by the United States of Europe. The coherence which has now been achieved between the European nations is and must be a source of gratification to us in America, not only because it flatters us that Europe is following our example, but because a union between the countries of Europe ought to be—I say ought to be—a strong guarantee for the peace of the world."

Hamilton glanced at Mr Reinhart and the Ambassador. Their faces were a study in embarrassment, especially Mr Brinsmead's. The Ambassador's mouth being closed, Mr Reinhart came to the rescue.

" Senator," he broke in, " I am sure there is no one in this country or in ours who does not coincide with that view. But if you are going to discuss all the implications of the new development in Europe, it strikes me that we shall not join the ladies for a very long time. And all of them, to say nothing of the Ambassador and myself, are due at two receptions, so that if we are to pay our respects to them at all we mustn't go too deeply into things just now."

" Excuse me, Reinhart," replied the Senator. " I doubt whether you or anyone who hasn't

been in America during the last two months can realise the excitement—I might almost say the trepidation—which is felt regarding these developments. I am visiting Europe for the express purpose of establishing as many contacts as I can, and getting a line on the situation from the European viewpoint. I am returning to America just as soon as I can complete my investigations, and I have no time to lose. So as I have been fortunate enough to meet Mr Wheeler on my first evening in London, I wish to discuss this vital issue from A to Z with so prominent and able a member of the British Government."

"But you are coming out with us, Wheeler?" said Mr Reinhart, looking at the Under-Secretary. "And you too, Mr Hamilton. Lady Willesden has told us to bring along any guests who may be dining with us."

"Thank you, Mr Reinhart," Wheeler replied, "but I think I should rather like to have a talk with the Senator."

"As you will," said Mr Reinhart. "Then you don't want to go to the Willesden reception, Senator?"

"No, sir, with all respect to your distinguished hostess. I reckon I can do more for my country in this room than by going to a dozen routs. And you and the Ambassador, and our charming

ladies, will represent America a lot better than *I* could."

"Hard lines, Ambassador, that you should be excluded from a discussion which may affect the fate of two nations," smiled Wheeler, "but I expect your diplomacy will be equal to the occasion."

"Far be it from me to cramp either your style or the Senator's," replied Mr Brinsmead. "But in all earnestness, gentlemen, I wish you God-speed in your deliberations. We meet to-morrow at the Embassy, Senator. I shall be most interested in all you have to tell me."

"Then if so much is settled, let us go to the drawing-room," said Mr Reinhart, rising. "Both you and Mr Wheeler, Senator, must make your excuses to my daughter. Meanwhile the United States of Europe must wait."

IV.

"I know what this means," exclaimed Sadie, as the men trooped in. "It means that Eric has to hurry off to the Foreign Office, and that the Senator has to write despatches to the President."

"Right, as usual," replied Wheeler. "I expect

to be very busy with important Foreign Office business."

"And I," said the Senator, "am hoping to put Mr Wheeler wise to several things, and myself to get a line on much that concerns our country."

"So you are not coming on with us, are you ? That is very sad. But *you* will go with us to Lady Willesden's, won't you, Mr Hamilton ? "

"I don't think so, thanks very much."

Hamilton had enough of the old-fashioned Scot about him to hate the idea of going anywhere in the train of anybody—even of Sadie. And he did not know the Willesdens. Doubtless Sadie had permission to bring a friend with her, but he was like the Highland boatman—he was not going to be beholden to anyone. A poor Indian Civilian, he knew, would be very much out of it at a show like that ; in fine, he was not going.

But Sadie was not a thought-reader. She did not know of these inhibitions, or of the dourness which underlay the suave exterior of her fellow-voyager. She pressed him, and he again declined, much to her annoyance.

"Very well," she said. "You will forgive us for moving, won't you ? Joan and I have at least three shows on our hands. I must leave you to talk politics with Eric and the Senator."

"I shall be very pleased," the Senator replied. "I gather that your young friend hails from the Orient, and I should welcome the opportunity of collecting his viewpoint on a crisis which threatens to involve the whole world at no very distant date."

Hamilton turned to Eric Wheeler deprecatingly. "I am only of the Indian Foreign Office," he said. "I should be in your way, I am afraid."

"By no means," Wheeler assured him, with a return to his languid air. "I imagine the Senator is going to be disappointed in any pointers I can give him. And if you can oblige him from the Indian angle of vision, perhaps you can make up for my deficiencies."

All of which Hamilton took to mean, "Confound you, butting in to a most important interview. But I can't keep you out, now that the Yank has dragged you into it by the ears. All I can pray for is that you won't make a bigger fool of yourself than you can help."

An interpretation which hardened his determination to assist at the conference, and if necessary to play for his own hand.

CHAPTER FOUR.

I.

THE Ambassador, Mr Reinhart and the five ladies having departed, Eric Wheeler led the way to Mr Reinhart's smoking-room, which was as cosy as was compatible with the magnificence of its setting. Here at length Senator Westerhout and the British Under-Secretary got to grips, and Hamilton listened to a conversation which fairly held him.

He himself had been Under-Secretary in the Indian Foreign Office, and had been cognisant of some fairly important negotiations—with China, for example, about the Mekong boundary. As, however, the Senator and Eric Wheeler ranged over the entire globe in their examination of current problems, he felt like a schoolboy taken from a game of marbles and set to watch a first-class polo match.

He had had many talks with Mr Reinhart

on the homeward voyage, and had been impressed by the extreme seriousness of the latest developments, as the Chicagoan viewed them. He had been all the more surprised on arriving in England to find that neither the press nor the public appeared to take any special interest in these matters. The 'Times' had published one or two guarded editorials, but had apparently missed several points on the vital importance of which Mr Reinhart had strenuously insisted.

From a remark let fall by Eric Wheeler early in the discussion he learned that the omission was deliberate. The Foreign Office had urged the conductors of the 'Times' to the utmost caution. The situation was so delicate that any heedless reference might produce a convulsion. Fortunately for all concerned, the sensational newspapers had not yet wakened to the possibilities ; but it was only a question of time when they must do so, and then the fat might be expected to be in the fire.

Senator Westerhout looked grave when Wheeler spoke of these things.

"I am going to put my cards on the table, Mr Wheeler," he said. "I am going to speak with perfect frankness, and I am certain that neither you nor Mr Hamilton will abuse my confidence.

" I am here on a mission, a non-official mission. I represent the dominant party in the United States Senate to this extent that I have been sent over to examine present trends in Europe, especially in view of the new confederacy which has now been joined by Volscia. Nat'rally the Ambassador isn't best pleased at the Senate shoving in its oar. It sort of implies a lack of confidence in his ability to handle the situation. He represents the President, and his hands are tied—so tied, Mr Wheeler, that he had to be glad to leave you and me to discuss the situation while he escorts his womenkind to a reception. Now I am free to talk with whom I will, and to say exactly what I think. And I think—and so do all the heads of big business over there—that America is goin' to feel one mighty big draught as soon as the United States of Europe has time to turn around and take stock of the situation."

" How are you going to feel it? " Wheeler asked.

" In our trade, sir, very nat'rally. We have been smothering European imports into America by the highest tariff in the world, and behind that tariff we have built up a manufacturing industry which exports two-thirds of its products to Europe. Hitherto we have profited by the dis-

union of Europe, and have been able to keep out European manufactures and practically drain Europe of its gold. But now, gentlemen, the boot is on the other leg. Europe has a Free Trade area to play with which approximates to that of America; and what we are afraid of is that Europe will copy us and impose a prohibitive tariff upon American manufactures."

"Imitation, you know—the sincerest form of flattery," murmured the Under-Secretary.

"Yes, sir, and where we are now so vulnerable is that, like you, we have come to depend mainly upon our foreign trade. Our exports constitute two-thirds of our manufactures. If they are barred out from Europe we are going to see the biggest trade slump in America that has ever occurred in our history."

"Things will adjust themselves," said Wheeler. "I take it the effect will be to coax back some at least of your gold to Europe, which needs it so badly."

"There you are wrong," was the reply. "The American public has come to believe in those stocks of gold as the Israelites believed in the Ark of the Covenant. No Government dare part with them any more than it dare remit the unpaid balance of the European War Debt."

"Then," said Hamilton, intervening for the

first time, "you don't agree with Mr Reinhart that the day is coming when the United States of America will remit the balance of the Debt?"

"Mr Reinhart is an idealist," replied the Senator, "and idealists have long been at a discount in America. Believe me, Mr Hamilton, money talks in my country to-day as much as ever it did. And there are two things we shall hold on to just as long as we can—our hoard of gold and the balance of the War Debt of Europe."

"In that case, Senator, I can easily understand the perturbation of big business," said Wheeler. "But if you can't face a hostile tariff, and are not prepared to release your gold, what do you propose to do about it?"

The Senator looked from one young man to the other.

"I speak for myself, gentlemen, as I have already told you," he answered. "But personally I can conceive of more impossible developments than an of-fensive and de-fensive alliance between America and the British Empire, with all barriers down, and a Free Trade area on which the sun never sets."

II.

If the Senator was taken aback by the sang-froid which greeted his proposal he put it down to the proverbial phlegm of the Britisher—and concealed his disappointment. The average American is fluent enough, but when it comes to the politician—! Anyhow, Mr Westerhout treated his hearers to a dissertation on the advantages of universal Free Trade which would have done credit to Cobden or Harold Cox.

When he paused for breath it was pointed out to him that the British Empire was largely Protectionist—that the only free unit in it was Britain, and that only in a *Pickwickian* sense. As for the Dominions, they were fiercely Protectionist.

“But you have India,” urged the Senator—“that great Empire numbering over three hundred million souls. You have the Crown colonies. Great Britain with India and the colonies and my country represent a population of nearly five hundred million. A Free Trade population of these dimensions, gentlemen, would be in a position to bid defiance to the rest of the world.”

“But, Senator,” objected Hamilton, “you

don't count India among the Free Trade units, do you?"

"Sure," answered Mr Westerhout. "India is still under tutelage to Great Britain, ain't she? And Britain's policy for India is Free Trade, ain't it?"

"No, Senator, it isn't, and hasn't been for more than a dozen years. India is strongly Protectionist, and is protected against no country more rigidly than against Great Britain."

"Say, Mr Hamilton," said the Senator after a pause. "I guess you've handed me a surprise. And I guess you've made out a good many Indians now orating in America to be downright ignorant about their own country."

"That is their lookout," Hamilton retorted. "India possesses complete fiscal freedom, and uses it to penalise British trade in every way."

"Well, sir, all I can say is I can't see America turning the Filipinos loose to tax American products. And if Great Britain is content to let India twist the lion's tail, why Great Britain has more patience and less spirit than we give her credit for."

Nothing daunted by the cold water that was being poured upon his scheme, the Senator proceeded to urge that the British Dominions would be speedily converted to Free Trade

once Britain, Canada and the United States of America had demonstrated its efficacy.

"What is the alternative?" he asked. "The alternative is a tariff war between America and Europe which must end in another kind of war. And that, gentlemen, would be the end of civilisation. Whereas an Anglo-American alliance would put the brake on warlike tendencies. Great Britain and America united would be an indefeasible guarantee of the peace of the world."

"There I am with you, Senator," responded Wheeler. "An Anglo-American alliance would as you say tend to check warlike tendencies in Europe and elsewhere. And ten years ago you would have been correct in maintaining that it would have guaranteed the peace of the world. Whether it could do so now is not quite so certain."

"How so, Mr Wheeler?"

The Under-Secretary shrugged his shoulders.

"You have just told us that America will not release her gold or abate one cent of her War dues from the European nations. I will be frank, like yourself, Senator, and point out that that attitude is producing a steadily increasing exasperation in Europe against America. Incidentally it has reduced America's moral influence to nil in the comity of nations. The

dissolution of the League of Nations is symbolical of that moral bankruptcy. Forgive me for speaking plainly."

"But, Mr Wheeler, granting that America is unpopular in Europe—and I'm not goin' to say she ain't—what has that got to do with it? I take it, every nation which outdoes its competitors in prosperity is liable to be envied and disliked. But when that is said, I still allow that the British Empire and the United States would prove an irresistible combination the very existence of which would prevent any threat of war."

"And the United States Senate is really on for an Anglo-American alliance?"

"I am hardly authorised to say that. But I can say, Mr Wheeler, that the majority are with me in considering that an entente would be a preferable alternative to the racket we can see ahead of us in the event of a Europe-America tariff war."

III.

It was close on midnight when Senator Westerhout went back to his own room, and the two young men left the hotel and walked along

Piccadilly together. Their attitude towards each other had been modified in the course of the evening. Hamilton's feeling of instinctive hostility had all but disappeared. He no longer looked on Wheeler as a possible rival. In any case he had taken a liking to him in which there was a certain admiration.

Wheeler on his part felt that Hamilton had afforded him just the right kind of backing. He had said neither too much nor too little. Eric Wheeler was a shrewd judge of men, and he summed up Hamilton as a confidential Scots official.

"Quite the most remarkable evening I have ever had," he said, as they walked away. "I knew things were pretty bad, but that old humbug has made it clear that they are so bad that even the Yankees are getting wise to it."

"The Anglo-American alliance proposal was a bit startling," Hamilton agreed.

"Oh, that's all right so far as it goes. I've no doubt the Yankees would now be quite prepared to consider it—especially as it would mean that we should get all the kicks and they would scoop in all the halfpence if it led to a European War—as it almost inevitably would."

"Yes, they've waited a bit too long," said Hamilton, "and now that they're going to have

the tariff war they've been asking for, they've got scared."

"Tariff war be hanged!" Wheeler replied.
"That's not the trouble, my dear chap. What they're afraid of is a real war."

"A Europe-America War?"

"You've said it. And judging from the ferment that's going on in Europe behind the scenes they've every reason to. I've never known of such general hatred against any nation as there is throughout Europe against the Yanks."

"But why should that be? There's been no change of policy so far as they are concerned."

"That's just it. There has been no change, and I believe old Westerhout when he says there will be no change in their policy. And Europe wants to see a change, or there will be trouble."

"But why should there be trouble now any more than at any other time during the last fifteen years?"

"The grievance is operating with cumulative effect. Great Britain has parted with six hundred millions to America and the other nations in proportion. And the bigger the sums that America has swallowed up the worse the nations are feeling about it. And then there's the gold scandal."

"A high European tariff will help that."

"But not quick enough—especially for Volscia."

"Then you are nervous about Volscia?"

"No more really than about any of the other European nations. But the American Ambassador is as nervous as a cat. Did you notice how uneasy he was at dinner?"

"That might possibly be because the Senator may put a spoke in his wheel."

"Partly, no doubt. But, Hamilton, you may take it from me that there is something brewing in Europe, and that the people against whom it is directed are the Americans. What it is exactly I don't know. It may be war. They certainly think it's war. And that is why they are throwing up the balloon of an Anglo-American alliance—or entente, as the old Senator man was quick to correct himself. Why on earth should Britain get entangled with America now, either by way of alliance or entente, when it is to her obvious interest to back up the United States of Europe?"

"The European Free Trade market?"

"Naturally. But apart from that, in the event of war we should have a hostile Europe at our doors, while America sat back and watched us being wiped out."

"That's rather a cynical 'viewpoint,' don't

you think? To do the Yankees justice, they don't let down their friends. They came into the last war with a rush, even if they did send us a whopping bill when it was over."

" Possibly. But they couldn't dump two million men in France this time with the same ease as in the big war. And their navy, in spite of its size, is a poor show—that's confidential, as of course everything I have said is. Our naval experts are contemptuous about it. With America as our ally they would be in despair."

" Then the old boy's mission is fantastic?"

" Absolutely. Its only point is the dead funk the Yankees are in. And yet they come crowding over into Europe as though nothing were the matter. I swear I would give Europe a wide berth if I were an American."

" What about our friends at the Ritz? They propose going on the Continent pretty soon, don't they?"

" So they do. Funny thing, Hamilton, I never think of them as Yankees. I feel almost inclined to warn them about it. The worst of it is I have nothing definite to go on. We only know at the Foreign Office that European feeling on the subject of America is working up to fever heat, and that more than one Government isn't sorry that it is so. Where did you

get that information you trotted out to-night about the drain of Indian gold to America?"

"I have friends in a Marwari firm in Calcutta. They have agents all over Europe, and they have more up-to-date news than most European concerns."

"Have they, by Jove? I wonder if they could give me a line on this business? It's idiotic to suggest it, of course. But the fact is, that officially we are all at sea. This is your club, is it? Well, good night, Hamilton. We must have another talk about things. And if you do happen upon anything that will throw light upon the European mystery you might let me know. The least straw sometimes shows how the wind blows. Good night."

CHAPTER FIVE.

I.

THE next day found Hamilton in the vicinity of the Bank of England. Not that he banked there, but his own bank was near it. His reason for going there was the painful necessity which obtrudes itself at frequent intervals upon every Indian home on leave—the necessity for renewing one's stock of bank notes, which have a trick of amazing elusiveness.

Having refilled his wallet, he walked along Throgmorton Avenue in thoughtful mood. The hints dropped by Eric Wheeler the previous evening had made him uneasy. Sadie had mentioned during dinner that she and her father were going to the Continent in a few days. It was to be a *Rundreise* taking in France, Germany, Italy, Czechoslovakia, and, of course, Volscia and Spain. He had thought how delightful it would be to make the tour with them, and

had wondered whether he could arrange to be in Paris, Berlin or Rome at the same time, so as at least to catch a glimpse of them.

From which it will appear that his emotions were beginning to get the upper hand. He knew perfectly well that for him to aspire to Sadie was to cry for the moon. He had every reason to believe that the more he thought about her, and the oftener he saw her and spoke to her, the worse it would eventually be for him. But that was a future trial. To see her and hear her was a present delight. And the worse it was going to be for him in the future, the greater the necessity to make the most of the present.

As he walked slowly along Throgmorton Avenue his eye was caught by the name GARRARD, MASON & Co. on tables of stone flanking the entrance to a group of chambers. The name struck a chord of memory, and he proceeded to study it. The association came back. That was the firm of stockbrokers which Green of Balliol had joined on going down from Oxford.

• Green and Hamilton had been intimates at the University. A Jew and a Scot! The unusual friendship had been the subject of numberless jokes which both had taken in good part—Green because the Jew is case-hardened, Hamilton

(it was hinted) because witticisms impinged harmlessly upon his skull in the absence of an opening, surgically fashioned, to afford them easy ingress.

Samuel Green was a couple of years older than Hamilton, and had gone down the year before him. The family name had originally been Grün, and its habitat Hamburg. The Green branch had, however, been naturalised in England for more than a century, changing its name by deed poll long before the Great War. It had a controlling share in the world-renowned firm of Green, Hayman & Co., and Samuel Green, if he had chosen, might have taken his seat in its office on leaving Oxford.

But Samuel Green was a younger son of the senior partner, nor did he get on particularly with his elder brother. He foresaw many years of what to his impatient spirit meant mere marking of time. Moreover, as he himself put it, silver might be all very well for his father and his brother, but he preferred gold. Now the Stock Exchange ought to be a gold mine to a man of ability; and Samuel Green had ability—any amount of it—and enterprise as well.

So he turned his back on the silver market and joined the stockbroking firm of Garrard,

Mason & Co. The head of the firm was a friend and co-religionist—a much better arrangement than if he had been his father. Between his own shrewdness and the backing of the senior, Samuel Green got on like a house on fire. After an apprenticeship of less than ten years he was, in fact, on the point of being admitted as a partner.

“I’ll look in on old Verdant,” said Hamilton to himself as he turned in at the door. Garrard, Mason & Co. were on the first floor; hardly worth while, therefore, waiting for the lift. Hamilton began to ascend the first flight of stairs—and half-way up was almost bowled over by a stout figure, amazingly active for its size, which was descending in a series of flying leaps, three steps at a time. Hamilton moved to make way; the other moved in the same direction, and tried to check his momentum. He failed, and next moment Hamilton was pinned against the wall, and at the same time embraced with a kind of bear-like virtuosity by a stranger who would otherwise have gone sprawling to the foot of the stairs.

“Awfully sorry, sir. My fault!” he gasped, in familiar tones. Then, as Hamilton held on to him and grinned—

“Hullo! . . . By Jove, it’s Scottie! How splendid! I *am* glad to see you, old man.”

"Looks as though you were," replied Hamilton, disengaging himself. He eyed his friend critically.

"Making money and putting on weight, Verdant. That's what's the matter with you."

"Don't you believe it," was the reply. "I cannoned against you not by weight but momentum. But this is great, Hamilton. When did you arrive, and how long are you stopping in town?"

"A fortnight or so, and I'm here indefinitely."

"That's good news. Now, Scottie, I'm dying to have a talk with you but I'm just off to a vital appointment. Look here, I shall be freer this afternoon—no I shan't, but as it happens I can take you to lunch to-day. Come back at one, Hamilton, and we'll have a snack and a crack. That suit you? Good. I'll give you the best lunch in London. I hate making off now, but we'll meet later. So long."

Three more leaps and he was at the bottom of the stairs. Hamilton followed more slowly, thinking hard.

II.

An hour and a half later he found himself seated opposite Samuel Green at a well-known restaurant much patronised by city men. As

he took stock of him his first impression of prosperity and wellbeing was more than confirmed. Samuel Green was tall, and already inclined to fleshiness at thirty. But his active movements counteracted this impression, which was further discounted by his ruddy cheeks, bright dark eyes and handsome good-humoured face. He had the true stockbroker's temperament ; he was sanguine, talkative, sympathetic and alert. With the instinct which seldom deserts his race, he had done just the right thing in choosing his vocation. He would have been much less of a success in his father's staid, not to say stolid, business.

He was now talking sixteen to the dozen. Hamilton found, like so many returned Indians, that what he himself had to say was of little interest. Green had asked him a few general questions about his work in India, and had then turned to more interesting topics—home politics, foreign politics, social affairs, the business situation—all with the share market as a background. Like many Jews, Samuel Green loved talking 'shop.' He found his business intensely interesting because it touched human life at so many points. He apologised for talking so much about it—and talked on.

Nothing could have suited Hamilton better.

A man who is keen on his job can make it interesting to others; and besides Green was unconsciously giving him the precise opening he wanted. Since their first encounter in the morning he had been studying American stocks in the 'Times'; and now he took the stockbroker aback by questioning him upon them with a view to investment.

Green showed ingenuous astonishment.

"American stocks!" he said. "Why, what has made you think of them?"

"Oh, well, America is one of the sound countries. It can never be conquered or overrun," said Hamilton. "I want to spread my money about a bit."

"But—forgive me, Hamilton. How much have you to invest?"

"Only a thousand or two—very little, I know, for a big firm like yours to handle. But if you can't be bothered with my account I hope you won't grudge me a tip or two as a friend."

"Of course not. But why go so far afield as America? There are quite a number of good British propositions—industrial, financial or municipal. I can recommend a dozen or two of them with confidence."

"I know, but I have a fancy for American

rails or oils. Now, what about New York Central?"

"No good—not just now, at all events."

"Pennsylvania?"

"Don't touch 'em."

"Mexican Eagles?"

Samuel Green shifted in his seat.

"Look here, Scottie, I don't know what's put this bee in your bonnet. But this is about the worst time you could choose for this particular stunt. Why not wait? All these shares you mention are likely to drop. When they do, then they might be worth considering; but not at present prices."

Hamilton mentioned one or two other propositions. He had never had the least intention of investing, but he wanted to get at the reasons for Green's attitude. As he expected, all his suggestions were turned down. He voiced his disappointment.

"Surely all American shares can't be rotten?" he ventured.

"But that's just what they are," returned Green. "Rotten as they can be—at all events from an investment point of view."

"Why?"

"Surely you read the newspapers, Scottie?"

"You mean the political situation?"

"Of course I do."

"Why, have there been any new developments?"

"Not to speak of. But I don't like the look of things, Hamilton."

"Neither do I. All the same I don't see how they should affect the status of American investments."

Samuel Green again changed his position.

"Well, old son," he said gravely, "you may take it from me that developments are impending which will very seriously affect American stocks."

"War?"

"Possibly, though not necessarily."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you."

"If it isn't war, what is it?"

"Honestly, I don't know."

"Look here, Verdant," said the Scot. "This is treating me like an infant, and frankly I don't like it. Evidently you know something of great importance and you don't want to tell me. As your friend and client surely I have a right to information which may affect my investments. Of course if you can't tell me, you can't. But if you can and won't, well, I am damned disappointed—that's all."

Green, still in agitation, lit his first after-luncheon cigar.

"I'm prepared to tell you all I know," he replied after a pause. "Not that there's very much to tell you. That's where the mystery comes in. But here is what has reached me from a source in which I have the utmost confidence.

"You know, of course, that our family is in the silver business, and that we have branches of the family and of the business all over Europe? Well, we have heard from our cousins in Paris—whose name, by the way, is Grün—that the Europe-America crisis is boiling up tremendously, and that it will be well for Americans to keep out of Europe for some time to come."

"You mean that war may break out at any time?"

"No I don't. My relatives have been careful to guard themselves against that. I doubt as a matter of fact whether they themselves are apprehensive of it, because—well, I needn't go into details, but their business commitments don't suggest that they are afraid of that particular event. But they do expect something pretty drastic to happen, and that is why they are dead off American buying at the present time. And they are pretty shrewd people,

Hamilton. I don't think you will go far wrong if you follow their lead."

"They gave specific warning to Americans not to venture on the Continent?" asked Hamilton.

"They gave as clear a warning as French financiers, who have no special love for Americans, might be expected to give."

"As it happens, I have two American friends who are starting on the Grand Tour in a few days."

"Then if I were you and they were my friends, I should do my utmost to detain them," said Green.

CHAPTER SIX.

I.

IT was three o'clock before Hamilton got back to his club. After looking at the papers and drinking a cup of tea, he walked across the park to Westminster and made for the Lobby of the House of Commons. Wheeler had told him he was to be found at the House every afternoon, and what he had learned from Green seemed important enough to communicate to the Foreign Under-Secretary.

He gave his card to an attendant with Eric Wheeler's name, and while he waited for him to appear, amused himself by studying the groups around him. Several of the members he recognised at a glance from their portraits, others from their caricatures. It came almost as a shock to realise that some of them were much better looking than he had expected to find them.

One or two lesser members were evidently

being interviewed by constituents. It was obvious in such cases that neither party was completely at its ease. The delegates from the country were clearly awed by their surroundings, but filled nevertheless with an agreeable sense of their own importance. The honourable member, on the other hand, was often struggling between a desire to tell his supporters to go to the devil, and a wholesome fear of consequences should he fail to meet their wishes. Hamilton surmised that the life of an M.P. was not always a happy one.

"Hullo, Hamilton! Got on to something good already?" fell on his ear. Eric Wheeler had come up unnoticed, as he stood absorbed in the scene before him.

Hamilton turned and nodded.

"It's really important, is it? You don't mind my asking, because there's rather a lively discussion going on at the moment, and I'm liable to be called on."

Hamilton gave him the gist of his conversation with Green. The Under-Secretary appeared to be impressed, and motioned him to two seats against the wall. They sat down, and Wheeler questioned him closely.

"This fellow Green is a Jew, do you say?"

"A German Jew, naturalised in Britain for

more than a century. The name originally was Grün."

"He knows too much, Hamilton."

"No more than he has told me. I'll swear he was honest when he said he knew no more."

"I don't know about Jewish stockbrokers, Hamilton, but I do know Jewish politicians; and unless they belong to different tribes, I'm not prepared to trust one any more than the other. Is your friend a Zionist?"

"The very last thing he would dream of being, from what I know of him."

"Ah! You know, of course, that our mandate for Palestine has once more set every Zionist against us. And the Zionists have a strong sentimental pull over the whole of Jewry. The result has been a widespread Jewish movement directed both openly and secretly against British interests. That's why I pricked up my ears when I heard your informant was a Jew."

"But this particular movement, whatever it is, is apparently aimed against Americans."

"Apparently—yes. But actually I haven't the slightest doubt that we are the ultimate objective. The Jews are long-sighted, and if they can stir up Europe against America they may place us in a very difficult position. Besides, I don't know

that they have any special cause to love the Americans."

"Wheeler," said Hamilton, "whatever the Zionists may be doing I don't believe for a moment that Green has anything to do with it."

"Oh, if he's a pal of yours I've no doubt he's a good sort," Wheeler replied. "Don't imagine I'm a Jew-baiter—on the contrary. But as a member of the Government I can't shut my eyes to the fact that the Jews, almost for the first time in history, have taken up an openly hostile attitude to us. As you can see, that is the very devil for us owing to their tremendous international pull. What you have told me inclines me to the view that they are at the back of this anti-American drive. And that makes it all the more serious and all the more difficult to counter, even if we knew what they are driving at."

"By the way," said Hamilton after a pause, "if the warning is genuine, oughtn't the Reinharts to be told? You remember they are going on the Continent in a few days."

"So they are. And they certainly ought to be warned. I think you should speak to them without delay."

"Won't you do it? The warning would come with greater authority from you."

"That's just the trouble. It would come with

too great authority. If any report of that kind came from me it would at once become official. Heaven knows what I should be letting the Government and the Foreign Office in for. No, Hamilton, the best person to speak to them is you. The old man has a liking for you. I know. You might tell them, though, that you have mentioned the matter to me, and that I entirely agree that they would be well advised to remain in England for the present."

" Supposing the Reinharts won't listen to me ? " queried Hamilton.

" In that case," was the cool reply, " their blood be upon their own heads. But I give them credit for greater sense. Now I must be off. But don't forget me if you hear of any further developments."

He wrung Hamilton's hand and went back to the chamber. The Scot departed, both puzzled and stimulated by what he had heard. The Jewish resentment over Palestine was a complication which he knew existed, but he had never imagined that it would grow to such a pitch as to threaten the peace of Europe. And he had as much confidence as ever in the good faith of Samuel Green. The stockbroker, he felt, was as ignorant of the exact character of the menace as he was.

· And anyhow, he told himself, with a light heart, it was crystal clear that Eric Wheeler was not in love with Sadie. If he had been he could not possibly have dismissed so airily the fate which might be in store for them.

II.

Both Mr Reinhart and his daughter were out when Hamilton called at their hotel the same evening. He left a note saying he would repeat the visit in the morning about eleven.

The note was addressed to Mr Reinhart ; nevertheless it was Sadie who received him next morning, her father having gone out. Sadie herself was obviously about to follow his example. She was hatted and gloved, and looked at him somewhat impatiently.

“ Father is so sorry he had to go out,” she said, “ but it was an appointment he had to keep. Is your business very urgent ? ”

“ I’m afraid it is,” he answered. “ I’m very sorry your father is out, as it is something I heard yesterday, and I felt he should be told at once. But as he is out I should like to speak to you about it.”

"Really? That sounds quite exciting. Sit down, Mr Hamilton, and tell me what it is—that is, if you really think I am capable of discussing it."

Hamilton sat down, and began without any beating about the bush.

"I think you said the other evening that you were going on the Continent in a few days."

"Yes; we go to Berlin next week, then on to Paris, Brussels, Rome and other places."

"It sounds good. I wonder if you will think me very impertinent if I advise you strongly not to make the trip—not just now, at all events."

Sadie opened her eyes.

"Why on earth not?" she asked.

There was alarm in her tones. She was very far from ignorant of the situation in Europe.

"Well, you know how strong the anti-American feeling is all over the Continent?"

"Yes, but there's nothing new in that. Why should you bring it up now?"

"For a very definite reason. I have been warned by a person who has business connections all over Europe, that no American should visit the Continent just now."

Sadie grew pale. "War?" she murmured.

"I wouldn't say that exactly. My informant

refused to commit himself, but even if it isn't war it means danger for you and your father if you leave England at the present time."

"But there are hundreds of people that we know who are travelling in Europe at the present time," she objected. "Surely they wouldn't be doing that if there were a danger of war? And there has been no whisper of war up to now."

"It may not be war, Miss Reinhart."

"Then what can it be?"

"My informant confesses that he doesn't know. But he is positive as to the unwisdom of Americans coming to Europe."

Sadie was clearly unconvinced.

"It's all very vague," she said, "especially as father has no idea that there is anything unusual in the wind. And he would be one of the first to take alarm if there were. The Ambassador, too—surely he would have known."

She paused.

"Who is your informant, Mr Hamilton?"

"I can't tell you his name; but he is a well-known stockbroker."

Sadie laughed outright.

"My dear man," she answered, "can you ask anyone to take the least notice of what a stockbroker says? I don't know what they're like myself, but I have heard my father and others

talk of them, and from what they say I wouldn't believe anything a stockbroker told me."

"You are very young, Miss Reinhart. There are stockbrokers and stockbrokers."

"But when you want us to give the Continent a miss and either remain in England or go back home, surely you ought to quote some better authority than that?"

Hamilton rose.

"I quite admit that I had no business to butt in," he said. "I'm sorry. But I felt I had to pass on the warning to you and your father. Mr Wheeler also thought you should be told about it."

"Then," she retorted, with a rising colour, "you have been discussing our plans with Eric Wheeler?"

"Certainly not. But I have discussed the situation with him. He, by the way, takes my broker friend more seriously than you do. And when I reminded him that you—and your father—were going abroad almost immediately, he agreed with me that you should be warned about it."

Sadie by this time was in as peevish a temper as she had ever been known to be in. She wanted to go out in a hurry, to begin with. She was also immensely chagrined at the thought of abandoning the European tour. And lastly, she resented the obtrusion of this quiet insistent young man into her—and her father's—affairs.

"If the danger is so great as all that," she said coolly, "I can't think why Eric didn't come and tell us himself. He knows us well enough."

Meaning—as, of course, Hamilton sensed her to mean—"You don't know us at all—how dare you?"

"I suppose he had his reasons," he replied, "but I felt I had to let you know anyhow. I'm sorry if I've offended you; but I'm glad I've spoken to you as I have done. Will you convey what I've said to your father? If he wants to discuss the matter further I shall, of course, be delighted."

"Thank you, Mr Hamilton," she said. "I shall certainly pass on the message to him, but I doubt whether he will want to discuss it with you. Father probably knows more about European politics than—than most people, and if there had been anything very terrible brewing I feel sure he would have heard. But it is good of you to have told us. Must you go? Well, goodbye, Mr Hamilton—if I don't see you again."

She held out her hand, and he felt that it was a dismissal. She was obviously angry. But he loved her; there was no blinking that fact now. And although it was fairly evident that she did not care a hang about him, he bowed and left her, resolved that no harm should come to her if he could possibly prevent it.

CHAPTER SEVEN.

I.

MARTIN ANDREAS, Dictator of Volscia, sat in his room in the Palazzo Des Affaires Étrangères on a hill overlooking the capital city of Regnum. The Palazzo had often been compared to an eyrie, and its occupant to an eagle watching over his native place. It may be conjectured that the simile was not displeasing to the Dictator ; at all events, no one had ever been imprisoned for making use of it.

It was a lofty spacious room commanding a splendid view of the entire city and the hills beyond. Its spaciousness was enhanced by the fact that it was practically bare of furniture save the table at which Martin Andreas sat, and two or three chairs grouped near it. The floor was of wood highly polished—an arrangement calculated to give the Dictator an additional chance of escaping the bullet or the dagger of

any would-be assassin. Anyone rushing into the room in a hurry would be likely to slip and fall before he had got very far; and if he fell he would never rise again. Andreas would see to that.

The Dictator himself was a man in the prime of life, slightly above the middle height, but built so sturdily that he looked below it. Vital to his finger-tips, his powerful frame in repose had a stillness which seemed to proceed from vast reserves of strength. His long pale face, his square jaw, his straight blunt nose, his deep-set grey eyes under a lofty brow, and even his close-cropped black hair, all helped to confirm the impression. Like those two great Italian dictators, Napoleon and Mussolini, he affected taciturnity; but when he spoke it was in deep guttural tones.

Most modern European statesmen who have risen from the ranks have been professional journalists. Martin Andreas was no exception to this rule. His newspaper experience had taught him, among other things, to gauge public feeling and to voice it. Where he differed from the ordinary journalist was that he had gone further, and had interpreted it practically. To do this, and to seize the supreme power in the State, was not difficult. A great many journalists

could have done it if they had had the necessary lack of scruple, which they doubtless had, together with the necessary courage, which they had not. But to hold on to the sceptre, having seized it, called for a cunning beyond any ordinary courage, and Martin Andreas was as cunning as he was bold.

He had now been at the head of Volscian affairs for five years. He looked like being at the head of them for fifty on one condition—that he carried out the undertaking, more implied than explicit, which had hoisted him into power. To do him justice, he had every intention of carrying it out, and very little doubt of his ability to do so.

For many years the Volscians had chafed under what they called the American yoke more than any other European State; and of all the Volscians Martin Andreas was the fiercest in his opposition to America. His greatest rival was for repudiation of the Volscian war debt and a national boycott of American trade. Andreas was not quite so simple. What harm would a boycott do America that was confined to one European country?

Andreas stood out for a pan-European combine, and seized the reins on the understanding that he would bring it about. He had begun

immediately to work for this object. Its attainment had been slow in coming, and there had been times when Volscian confidence in him had wavered. But he had never doubted himself; no man who steadily pursues a single objective for years ever does.

Patience and determination had had their reward at last. Andreas set out to kill the League of Nations—and killed it by holding aloof from the United States of Europe so long as Europe paid even lip-service to the League. One subtle and determined man is generally more than a match for half a dozen less determined than himself. Still more is he a match for two dozen, more than half of whom are weaklings. The United States of Europe dissociated themselves from the League of Nations in order to secure the adhesion of Volscia. All the other members of the League promptly followed suit; the League collapsed; and the greatest barrier against war disappeared at the very moment when the adhesion of Volscia to the United States of Europe had converted that body into an open and aggressive rival of the United States of America.

This was Andreas' hour. He had redeemed his promise to his countrymen. He had justified his dictatorship. He had brought the whole

of Europe (except Britain) into line with Volscian policy. It only remained to give direction to the European mass which had at last been set in motion. That should be an easy task compared to the labour of wagging the dog of Europe by the Volscian tail. Volscia went mad with delight. Its people were the most vindictive in Europe. They were led by an autocrat inspired by the same hatreds, but guided by a cool head and a calculating genius which might be relied upon to put every ounce of force into the blow which was about to be delivered. No man possibly is a hero to his valet, but if ever a dictator was a hero to his people it was Martin Andreas to Volscia in June 1941.

II.

A bell rang, and Martin Andreas put down the sheaf of telegrams he was reading and took up the receiver of the telephone connecting him with his Secretary.

“Who do you say—Wilbraham Bright? Are you sure? Describe him.”

The description was apparently satisfactory, for the Dictator presently said—

“That will do. Show him in.”

A minute afterwards the door at the end of the long room opened, and a tall grey-haired man appeared on the threshold. Andreas sprang from his chair, advancing into the middle of the room to meet him. The Dictator moved with the effortless ease and swiftness of a panther.

"*Mon cher* Bright!" he exclaimed. "This is indeed a welcome surprise."

The two men shook hands, and Andreas led the visitor to his table. Wilbraham Bright was one of the best-known journalists in Europe. He had edited a famous evening paper in London for many years, but was now retired from the editorship. Still alert and vigorous at sixty-three, he devoted himself to writing for newspapers and magazines, chiefly on foreign affairs. He had a suave and charming manner, which in his writings was transmuted into a style persuasive and almost irresistible. Nothing ever seemed to ruffle him, either as a man or as a journalist. His mild blue eyes beamed on all the world with a benevolent neutrality, just as his articles never failed to point out that there were two sides to every question. Some people, indeed, complained that it was difficult to know which side he was on, but they were the hasty ones. A careful reading of his articles might be depended on to reveal that, like Disraeli,

he was on the side of the angels ; while even his opponents rose from their perusal persuaded that they were the essence of sweet reasonableness.

Bright had known Andreas twenty years before, when he was a young and struggling journalist. The affable English editor had shown kindness to the young Volscian in London at a time when he badly needed friends ; and the Dictator had never forgotten it. The two had corresponded at intervals after Andreas had returned to Volscia. One of the proudest moments in Andreas' life had been when Bright paid his first visit to Regnum as his guest after he had become Dictator. He knew Bright too well to expect to impress him ; but at least he was able to pride himself on making some return for the other's former patronage.

At the same time the pleasure which he found in Wilbraham Bright's company was qualified by a certain uneasiness. The genial Briton had a profoundly sceptical outlook and no enthusiasms whatever ; and a little time spent in his society was apt to prick the bubble of the Dictator's confidence alike in himself and his country. He took it in good part, recognising that it was a healthful tonic ; but was not generally sorry to get it over.

Bright sat down in the chair nearest to that

of the Dictator, crossed his legs, declined a cigarette, lit a long cigar, and then surveyed Martin Andreas with his whimsical good-natured smile.

"Am I disturbing you?" he asked.

"Not at all—except that I am rather surprised that you didn't let me know you were coming. Where are you staying?"

"At the Kreisler, where I am very comfortable."

"Let me send for your bags. You are, of course, my guest."

"No, thank you, my dear Excellency. It is very good of you, but it is hardly worth while giving you the trouble. I shall leave Regnum to-morrow."

"And you arrived——?"

"This morning. I was in Paris yesterday. My trip to Regnum was undertaken at the shortest possible notice."

"Ah!"

Hitherto the conversation had been in French, and on a plane of cordial friendship. The Dictator now compressed his close-shaven lips, his eyes narrowed as he glanced across the table, and he switched the conversational medium suddenly to a colder and more formal English. These abrupt transitions of his had nonplussed many

an opponent. This one produced not the slightest impression on the smiling composure of Wilbraham Bright.

Andreas now knew, and Bright knew that he knew, that his old friend had not dropped in merely to ask how he did, but that he had been charged with an unofficial message of national, or rather of international, importance.

III.

The Dictator waited for Bright to open the attack. The Englishman, who was in no hurry to begin, smoked on in contemplative silence. Andreas shuffled the papers on his table, and at last, passing over one of the telegraphic sheets, asked—

“Have you seen this?”

Wilbraham Bright accepted it calmly and, adjusting his spectacles, perused it deliberately. Then he handed it back.

“Yes,” he replied. “I have seen these extracts. Curiously, it was about them that I have ventured to call on you.”

“I’m not surprised. This, I imagine, is going to force the hand of the British Government.”

Bright smiled.

"I don't think so, Your Excellency," he answered.

"What! Do you mean that the Government can ignore important papers like the 'Daily Watch' and the 'Daily Hustler?'"

"It could ignore them if they were backed up by the 'Daily Screech' and the 'Daily Rattler.' Your Excellency forgets that the press has less influence in England than it has in Volscia."

"But it voices public opinion."

"I doubt whether it does so in this case. And that is one reason why I have taken the liberty of coming here to-day."

"I thought so, Bright. Let me tell you, however, that whether it represents British opinion or not, it certainly voices Volscian opinion; and that Volscia is delighted to receive such an influential British backing."

"Quite so; and that is the other reason why I have come to see you."

Andreas threw himself back in his chair. Much as he liked Wilbraham Bright, his *sang-froid* could be confoundedly irritating.

"Very well," he said. "Tell me what you have come to say."

Bright suddenly became serious.

"I have come to point out with all respect,

Your Excellency," he said, "that this outburst on the part of the sensational press in England has thrust Europe on to the parting of the ways. That, I take it, is the precise point to which you have been labouring to bring it all these years."

"It is; and you can hardly expect me to be other than gratified to have the British press behind me."

"A portion of the British press," said Bright in correction—"a portion of the press to which incidentally I have been opposed all my life. But that is a detail. You are then on the eve of forcing the United States of Europe into a tariff war with the United States of America?"

"That's it. To put it briefly, U.S.E. versus U.S.A."

"Your Excellency is, of course, aware that a tariff war must lead to a real war?"

"Not necessarily; but I am prepared for that."

"Are the United States of Europe prepared?"

"As ready, I imagine, as the United States of America."

"I am here to tell you that England is not."

Andreas shrugged his shoulders.

"That, of course, would be a pity from my point of view," he said, "but I'm afraid it hardly

weighs with me against the dictates of our considered national policy. This country, Mr Bright, has been in a state of economic slavery to the United States of America ever since the Great War. Its dignity has been insulted again and again by the U.S.A. Its prestige has been lowered so far as it has been in the power of America to lower it. I have been made Dictator to avenge these wrongs. And now that I have brought Europe into line with Volscian policy, do you—does England—suggest that I should draw back from carrying it out?"

The Dictator's deep voice became louder and louder as he spoke. His eyes blazed; he was clearly addressing an imaginary crowd from the balcony of his Palazzo.

Wilbraham Bright smoked steadily until he had calmed down again.

"Your Excellency can scarcely imagine that I would be so foolish as to set myself—or rather you—against Volscian policy," he then remarked. "And when you speak of economic slavery, please don't forget that Britain has a still bigger grievance against America than you have. But you and I are old friends. We have helped each other more than once in the past. I feel, rightly or wrongly, that I can speak more frankly to you than most men—although I am also

conscious of the vast difference in our relative positions. I am now, as when we first met, a simple journalist; an observer and a recorder of great events. You are at this moment the most powerful statesman in Europe. You know me well enough to acquit me of any desire to flatter you; but it is no exaggeration to say that the fate of the world is now in your hands. Volscia has joined the United States of Europe in order to force on war—whether you call it tariff or armaments doesn't matter. All I beseech you is—don't go into it blindly. Think it over in all its aspects. A few weeks hence it may be too late."

IV.

The Dictator was moved. For a moment he saw himself as Wilhelm II., the monarch with whom the choice between peace and war lay apparently open in the fateful year 1914. But, like the German Emperor, he knew that the apparent freedom of choice was mainly illusory. He was being driven on by national forces which he had largely helped to create. His old friend might as well have asked him to hold up an avalanche.

"Bright," he said, after a pause, "you have spoken like the straightforward Englishman I have always known you to be. I am honoured by your friendship. But I have, in fact, considered all the implications of the policy to which Volscia is committed. I admit that the possibility of a world war is one of them. But, if it comes to that, there has been a possibility of war in every important international development since the Great War. And although war has often threatened since then, it has never materialised."

"Why was that?" rejoined Wilbraham Bright. "Because the League of Nations has stepped in. But you have killed the League."

"Be that as it may," Andreas replied, "the risk of war must be taken every now and then by every great State or group of States. Now let me say with emphasis that I do not believe that Volscian policy is going to plunge the world into war. I admit that it aims at the humbling of this Transatlantic upstart; and you know as well as I do that there is not a Power in Europe which won't rejoice to see that done."

"Possibly, but not at such a fearful cost."

"That remains to be seen. You and your Government have clearly made up your minds that there is going to be another world war.

I don't admit that for a moment. In any case you may take it from me that neither Volscia nor the United States of Europe is going to begin any war—tariff or otherwise."

Bright looked at the Dictator in blank astonishment.

"Your Excellency is serious?" he asked.

"I never was more serious, my dear friend."

"That is good hearing," said Wilbraham Bright after a pause. "But you will forgive me for saying that it is almost completely at variance with your whole attitude and policy up to the present moment."

Andreas eyed him whimsically.

"If there is a war," he said, with an almost exaggerated deliberateness, "it will only be because your pacific friends the Americans insist on it."

CHAPTER EIGHT.

I.

WILBRAHAM BRIGHT walked back to the Kreisler Hotel in a more than usually thoughtful mood. He had to own himself beaten. One of his side-shows, as he put it, was the undertaking, at the request of the British Government, of unofficial missions on the Continent. He knew most of the leading European statesmen personally, and was generally liked and respected abroad. His visit to Regnum was the result of a telegram from Whitehall, asking him to see Martin Andreas and use all his influence to induce that headstrong Dictator to pause before plunging Europe and America into war.

The occasion for this message was that the British sensational press had at last taken the bit between its teeth. In the universal unpopularity of America it had spotted a journalistic gold mine, which it was now out to exploit for

all it was worth. Volscia's entry into the United States of Europe had furnished the key-note of the hue and cry; and the 'Daily Watch' and the 'Daily Hustler'—both owned by the same ring—had broken out in their best style, calling for a prohibitive tariff on all American goods. Further, they had demanded that America should disgorge at least a third of her enormous accumulation of gold, which at that time was estimated at more than 1300 millions sterling. How America was going to do this, seeing that she had notes outstanding to at least three times the amount of her gold reserve, did not worry the ennobled newspaper magnates in the least. Abuse of America was a winner from the circulation point of view, and that was all they cared about.

Naturally Martin Andreas was pleased. The 'Watch' and 'Hustler' were not content with shouting for a European combine against America. They made Andreas the hero of their campaign. They hailed the breakaway from the League of Nations as the greatest individual triumph in Europe since Bismarck created the German Empire. In short, they did their utmost to stampede the country into a blind backing of the Volscian Dictator.

A press campaign of this sort in Britain was

obviously a highly dangerous development—more so than any of the many similar campaigns which had been run by the Continental press. To cheer on Volscia in its anti-American crusade was not only superfluous, but an act of madness.

The Foreign Office had looked round desperately for some means of counteracting the mischief. That was why Wilbraham Bright had posted at an hour's notice from Paris to Regnum. His friendship with Andreas, it was hoped, would enable him to explain to the Dictator that the British nation was not behind the 'Watch' and the 'Hustler'; and also to make an eleventh-hour appeal to him in the interests of peace.

He had carried out both missions to the best of his ability, but as he walked back to his hotel he felt that he had failed—and that badly. Andreas had bluffed. That was certain. He had had the hardihood to repudiate any war-like intentions, although Volscia was openly spoiling for a fight. He had actually declared that if war did occur it would be on the initiative of America. His manner, too, suggested that he was not serious. That in itself was bad, because Andreas was accustomed to take himself with extreme seriousness. What was the meaning of it? Wilbraham Bright had to confess himself nonplussed. Before he reached his hotel he

had resolved to make a longer stay in Regnum than he had intended. There was something untoward brewing. He must do his utmost to uncover and prevent it, or at least to mitigate its worst consequences.

II.

Wilbraham Bright had expected to dine alone that evening. In the lounge, however, he met an old acquaintance who was none other than J. G. Reinhart; and was introduced not only to Sadie, but also to U.S. Senator and Mrs Westerhout. Bright had heard of the Senator's eccentric mission to Europe, and knew of the cool reception he had met with in London. He was all the readier to fall in with the suggestion that he should dine with the Americans. He wanted to know how Senator Westerhout had fared with the various European chancelleries, and especially what had happened to him in Regnum.

He had not to wait until they sat down to dinner. Over an *aperitif* the Senator plunged into his grievances against Volscia in general and the Dictator in particular. He spoke in his usual trumpet tones. His hearers could only

hope that the other occupants of the lounge did not understand American. It appeared that his reception—or rather non-reception—by the Volscian Dictator was calculated to force on an international crisis.

"As an international journalist, Mr Bright, whose name is a household word in America," he said, "you are doubtless acquainted with my own reputation and career. You are aware that I am not a firebrand, or in any other way undesirable. I have been charged with an important mission by the majority in the United States Senate. I have interviewed most of the leading statesmen in Europe, including your own Foreign Secretary in Whitehall, and I have everywhere been received with courtesy until I came to Regnum."

"Yes, Senator, and what happened here?"

"Why, sir, I have been not merely ignored by Mr Andreas, but insulted. I called on the Dictator, leaving my card, and requesting an appointment in order to discuss vital points connected with Americo-Volscian relations. I waited for two days, sir, without receiving any reply. At the end of that time, fearing that something had happened in the post—I can well imagine anything happening in this city—I decided to wait on Mr Andreas without an

appointment. I went to the Palazzo. I was shown into the ante-room. I sent in my name to Mr Andreas. After I had been kept waiting an hour, a secretary came out and informed me that the Dictator could not see me. No expression of regret, no attempt at an excuse. Just a bare and not too civil a refusal to receive me—”

Here Mr Reinhart interposed. Apparently some of the other occupants of the lounge understood English, and were listening to the Senator's story with an embarrassing interest.

“Say, Senator,” he said, “I reckon we shall do well to finish the story in the dining-room. This place is too public for the relation of a confidential interview—even if that interview never came off.”

Mr Westerhout, who was much less sensitive to atmosphere than his fellow-countryman, looked aggrieved, but as Mr Reinhart was already piloting Mrs Westerhout to the saloon, and the other members of the party had begun to follow, he, too, joined the little procession, and did not resume his narrative until they were all seated at table.

“And don't forget, Senator,” said Mr Reinhart, as an additional warning, “that this is not a free country, and that some of the waiters

are probably spies ready to denounce us to the Dictator."

"Sir," was the reply, "I reckon that you and I are American citizens—the proudest title in the world, saving your presence, Mr Bright—and the spy system has yet to be invented that should preclude us from voicing what is, after all, nothing but the plain truth."

"By no means—only be careful," answered Mr Reinhart.

"Well, Mr Bright, as I was saying, I was taken aback some by this treatment of an American in my position. But I put the best face on it that I could.

"'If Mr Andreas is too busy to see me to-day,' I said, 'I shall be happy to call again at any hour to suit him. Perhaps you could do me the favour of ascertaining the day and hour that would be convenient?'

"Whereupon the young man replied, with a studied insolence of manner which I couldn't attempt to reproduce, that Mr Andreas was not prepared to fix an appointment at any time, but that he hoped I would find a congenial occupation in doing the antiquities of Regnum.

"That was all, Mr Bright; and now tell me what you think of such barefaced insolence

to a man who is a kind of unofficial ambassador to Europe?"

Thus appealed to, Bright shrugged his shoulders.

"Very annoying, of course," he said, "but I must confess I am hardly surprised."

"How so?" demanded the Senator.

"For one thing, your mission, so far as Volscia is concerned, comes several years too late. If you had paid this visit five years ago, and if you could have brought with you as an olive branch a remission of Volscia's Debt to America, I imagine you would have met with a very different reception."

"Well, sir, barring the remission of the Debt the object of my mission is to smooth out the relations between America and Volscia," protested the Senator. "I fail to see how a mission of that sort is out of date at the present time."

"But it is, Senator, because Volscia has now made up its mind to try conclusions with your country. Martin Andreas has been made Dictator for that very purpose; and from my own observation I should say that the challenge to America will come almost immediately."

The Senator was completely taken aback, and for once found nothing to say. The older members of the party looked at each other with consternation.

But Sadie's patriotism had been wounded not once but several times during their sojourn on the Continent. She had been greatly irritated by the affront to Senator Westerhout, and Bright's cool, quiet appreciation of the crisis had a further disturbing effect on her. She turned her pretty flushed face to the Englishman and said—

"Surely the United States of Europe will step in to prevent such madness. Volscia will get chawed up if she starts monkeying with America."

Bright smiled—partly because he loved young people, and partly because he was intrigued to hear this delightful English-spoken girl reverting to her native American under the influence of excitement.

"Tell me, Miss Reinhart, how your country will proceed to 'chaw up' Volscia."

"We have the finest navy in the world, Mr Bright. We have the finest air fleet. We can raise an army of ten millions in six months. We have illimitable resources. Volscia will be mad if she challenges America."

"There's method in her madness, though," he replied. "It's true you have enormous resources, but how are you going to bring them into play? You will be operating three thousand

miles from your base. That puts your navy out of count at once. Your air fleet might conceivably get across and bomb Regnum, but I don't quite see how it could get back. In fact, Miss Reinhart, it looks to me as if Volscia is in a position to make a long nose at America—and get away with it."

"You are quite right," struck in Mr Reinhart. "Hitherto the Atlantic has served us well, but in a European war—without British backing—it would prove a barrier which we could not cross."

"But neither could the Volscians cross it," said Sadie triumphantly, "so where would be the good of their going to war at all?"

"As a matter of fact," answered Bright, "I don't think they do mean to go to war. Their challenge to America will almost certainly take some other form."

"A tariff war?" suggested the Senator.

"Most probably. Remember that in anything they may do they will now be backed up by the entire Continent."

"But not by England?" put in Mr Reinhart.

"But hardly by England," Wilbraham Bright agreed.

III.

"And now, Miss Reinhart," he said, turning to Sadie, "how does Regnum appeal to you?"

"I have loved every minute in it," she replied enthusiastically. "The Martian Hill, the old forum, the Museum, everything seems like visiting ancient Europe in a dream. The only drawback is the unfriendliness of the people."

"They are the most vindictive people in Europe," said Bright, "and I'm afraid America has got their backs up badly. How were you treated in Paris and Rome?"

"Oh, civilly enough, but coldly—very coldly. Why do Europeans behave so to us, Mr Bright?"

Wilbraham Bright threw an amused glance at the Senator.

"Probably because you are too well off," he replied. "The Haves are always unpopular with the Have-nots."

Bright accompanied his friends to the opera after dinner; but left the theatre early, making the perfectly true excuse that he had important letters to write. It was a lovely night, and he walked back to the hotel. As he turned into the Strada Reale he noticed that he was being followed. He smiled to himself; he was used

to it. He ascended the broad flight of steps leading to the lounge of the hotel.

At the top he was met by a superior police officer, who saluted and asked him, civilly enough, for his name.

Wilbraham Bright gave it.

"The Signor is an American, is he not?"

"No, Signor, I am English."

"But his friends are American?"

"That is so. Nevertheless I am an English journalist, and am well known to the Government."

The policeman was polite, but still suspicious.

"If you will take me to M. Andreas now," Bright went on, "the Dictator himself will vouch for me. Not six hours ago he invited me to stay at the Palazzo."

The official looked hard at him. Bright bore the scrutiny with easy indifference. The man saluted again, and said—

"It is enough, Signor. I am satisfied on all points. But—one word of advice—be careful how you associate with Americans."

He turned away, and Wilbraham Bright went to collect his room key. As he stood at the counter a young man, obviously an Englishman, came up to the hall porter. He was wrapped up as though he had just come off an air journey.

"Can you tell me," he asked of the porter, "if Mr and Miss Reinhart are staying here?"

Bright looked more closely at the speaker, and decided that he liked the looks of him. He was middle-sized, black-haired, and wore a black moustache. He was, in fact, Robert Hamilton, who had just flown from Paris.

"Yes," Bright interposed, "they are staying here. They have gone on to the opera."

Hamilton looked disappointed.

"Thanks very much," he said. "I had rather an important message for them. Do you know them, sir?"

"I do. My name is Wilbraham Bright."

"I know the name, sir, very well. Mine is a humbler one—Robert Hamilton of the Indian Civil Service."

The two men walked away from the counter together, and, after making sure that no one was within earshot, Hamilton added—

"I would have liked to warn them to-night; but I suppose to-morrow will have to do."

"Warn them—pardon me—of what?" asked Bright.

"Against a serious danger which I believe to threaten them unless they leave Volscia at once."

"May one ask what that is?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you, because I don't know exactly what it is. But in Paris this morning I received so urgent a warning about Americans in Volscia, that I chartered a plane and flew here at once to let them know. I've only just arrived."

"I was in Paris myself yesterday," said Bright. "I heard no word of any special danger threatening Americans in this country. Of one thing I feel certain—it isn't war."

"That's just what my friends in Paris said," Hamilton replied.

Wilbraham Bright looked at him without speaking. Presently he asked—

"Are you staying at this hotel?"

"No, I have a room at the Imperiale."

"You are coming here to-morrow to see the Reinharts?"

"I am coming the first thing in the morning. The matter is most urgent."

"I should greatly like to have a talk with you when you do come," said Bright.

CHAPTER NINE.

I.

ROBERT HAMILTON came round to the Kreisler before eight o'clock next morning, and succeeded in interviewing Mr Reinhart almost as soon as he was up. What he had to tell him was as follows :—

He had gone to Paris armed with an introduction to the Grüns, French Jews who were cousins of his friend Samuel Green of the City. They had been hospitality itself, and he had got to know them well. The Grüns were silver merchants and bankers and had financial connections all over Europe. Through these they had a vast amount of inside information, political and commercial.

Two nights before the crisis had come up for discussion, and Simon Grün, the head of the house, fortified by his special knowledge of the situation, had hazarded the view that a violent

clash would take place almost immediately between America and the United States of Europe; and that the focus of the collision would be Volscia.

Thereupon Hamilton had mentioned that he had two American friends in Regnum at the present moment.

"In that case, Monsieur Hamilton," said old Simon Grün, "I should make every effort, if I were you, to get them away from there before the 1st of July."

Hamilton glanced at the calendar. It was nine o'clock in the evening of the 28th June.

"War, then, is about to break out?" he queried.

"It may and it may not," was the cautious reply. "In any case I should endeavour to get your friends out of Volscia at once."

Thanks to the help and influence of the sympathetic Grüns, Hamilton was able to charter a fast private aeroplane in which he left Paris before nine o'clock next morning. His plan was that Mr Reinhart and his daughter should fly back to Paris by his plane on the 30th. His Jewish friends were to offer them hospitality for the night, or longer if they wished it. It was assumed that they would cross to England almost at once. Hamilton, who as an English-

man was immune from arrest, would return to Paris at his leisure by rail.

Mr Reinhart thanked the young man most cordially.

"I want to say," he remarked, "that you have shown real friendship by going to such trouble and expense on our account. I won't forget it, Hamilton. But I'm afraid it's not possible for Sadie and me to clear out of Regnum to-day."

"Why not?" Hamilton's voice held a sharp note of disappointment.

"Well, you see, we are not entirely on our own. In a sense we are taking care of our friends the Westerhouts—you will remember United States Senator Westerhout? The Senator, I calculate, would be right glad to shake the dust of Regnum from his feet after the rebuff he has sustained; but Mrs Westerhout has a sister here who is lying very sick at her residence. Mrs Westerhout doesn't propose to leave her sister for a week or so—not until she is well out of danger. Sadie and I couldn't leave Mr and Mrs Westerhout by themselves at such a time. So I reckon we must take our chance, Mr Hamilton, and pray that better counsels may prevail in Volscia even at the eleventh hour."

"But that is impossible," Hamilton protested. "I assure you my friends in Paris wouldn't have spoken as they did without the gravest reason. Unless you get away from Volscia to-day you will run heavy risks."

"What risks, Hamilton? Have you noticed anything untoward here in Regnum?"

"No, I haven't, but that proves nothing."

"Mr Wilbraham Bright, whom you probably know by reputation—"

"I met him in the hotel last night."

"Mr Bright, who is a friend of the President—that is, of the Dictator—and who is probably more behind the scenes than most foreigners, doesn't think the Volscians are going to declare war."

"He may be mistaken. I'll swear my Jewish friends are not."

"Nor does the American Ambassador. I reckon these two men should know, if anyone does. And Sadie and I would look mighty foolish if we ran away from our engagements in Regnum through a fear which didn't materialise."

Hamilton bit his lip. It was difficult to be patient with this amiable fatuity. He knew in his bones that the Grüns were right—that trouble of the gravest was impending—but

how to convey the truth to Sadie's father? Could he expect to fare any better with Sadie herself?

"Now, don't say a word about it to Sadie," said her father, when he asked if he could see her. "She is kind of worried because of the Volscian attitude to Americans, and I reckon that she would hit the ceiling if she heard that we were liable to be made prisoners of war inside of twenty-four hours. Myself, I don't see it happening, Mr Hamilton, and therefore I don't want Sadie disturbed unnecessarily."

"All right," said the Scotsman gloomily, as he rose to go.

"But you'll stay to breakfast," cried Mr Reinhart. "We shall eat our next meal in half an hour—all of us—and in the meantime you can think out a good reason to give Sadie why you have suddenly turned up in Regnum."

II.

Hamilton thought hard during the long half-hour which he spent in the lounge before any of the Americans appeared. Mr Reinhart's mild obstinacy was both irritating and ill-timed. It would serve the old man right if he were laid

by the heels; it would certainly teach him a lesson. But with Sadie it was different. He shuddered at the possibility that she might be arrested and sent to an internment camp, possibly for months, or even years; it would all depend on the duration of the Volscio-American—or rather the Europe-American war.

He had a fast plane at his disposal, and if her silly old father chose to put his head in a noose he must be prevented from endangering his daughter; that was all. To argue with Sadie on the risks she was running would be as futile, he knew from experience, as to talk any further with her father. Therefore he must get her out of Volscia without letting either of them know what he was doing.

At breakfast he noticed, with concern, that Sadie looked ill. She was pale and there were dark shadows under her eyes. Obviously some kind of mental strain. He recalled what her father had said. She must be feeling the atmosphere of Regnum most acutely if it was having this effect upon her.

He flattered himself, however, that she was glad to see him. That was a welcome change from the somewhat frigid terms on which they had parted in London.

Another thing that struck him was the com-

parative silence of the elders. Your middle-aged American as a rule is prepared to discuss any subject under the sun, especially if he happens to be a Senator. But this morning Mr Reinhart and the Westerhouts had a somewhat weary air. They seemed quite content to let Sadie and Hamilton do the talking.

Sadie herself looked weary when he asked her how she liked Regnum.

"I like it and I don't," she replied. "You see there are two Regnums. There is the Regnum of the Campus Martius, the citadel and the other relics of the old Roman days. I like that; it is fascinating. But I don't like the other Regnum—the Dictator on his prancing horse, the frantic crowds that listen to him in the Plaza Imperiale. But they are an interesting study in psychology. Each excites the other."

"What is the Dictator like?" asked Hamilton.

"We've only seen him in public," said Sadie. "You know, of course, that he won't receive Americans—he even declined to see Senator Westerhout. But he shows himself every day in public on horseback, dressed in a plain green uniform—"

"Napoleon over again," Hamilton murmured.

"And as often as not he addresses the crowds that line up in the great square. They say he

has been doing that only during the last few weeks. He is a handsome man, with a dark, rather sinister, face and a great deep voice with a ring in it. Anyway he is one of the reasons why I don't like Regnum."

"Any other reasons?" queried Hamilton.

Sadie looked round her, and the other Americans did the same—a very un-American gesture.

"Yes," she said, "there is the disgusting espionage on all Americans. We are shadowed every minute of the day. Probably our waiters and attendants are spies. There is nothing but spying and hostility. I'm fed up with Regnum. I shall be glad to get away from it."

"Don't get impatient, little woman," said her father. "We have only a few more days now."

"In the meantime," suggested Hamilton, "I wonder if you would care for me to run you over to Fiora in my plane to-day. Or have you done Fiora?"

"No, I haven't," Sadie answered. "I'd love to go, but I'm going shopping with Mrs Westerhout."

"Don't let me stand in your way, my dear," said the good lady. "Mr Reinhart will help me just as much as you could in the curio shops, and the others can stand over."

"I'm sorry I can't give anybody else a joy-ride," said Hamilton, "but unfortunately my plane only carries two passengers. You'll come, then, Miss Reinhart?"

"I should love to," she replied, her pretty face lighting up for the second time since they had sat down.

"Then shall we start immediately after breakfast?" said Hamilton. "Don't forget to bring wraps, as it may be cold coming back. I generally carry a small valise as well, with a change of clothes. You never know what may happen."

"There speaks the canny Scot," she laughed. "Well, Americans can look ahead, too. I'll carry a suitcase with me."

The prospect of escaping from Regnum for a day had completely restored her spirits. She made her excuses to the party and ran up to her room to get ready for the journey.

"Well, Hamilton," said Mr Reinhart, "I'm glad you're giving little Sadie an outing away from Regnum. The place seems to be getting on her nerves."

III.

The hotel porter carrying Sadie's natty suitcase called a taxi, and the two young people got in. At the same time a man, who had been lounging about the entrance to the hotel, jumped into another taxi, which followed them to the aerodrome.

Sadie's face clouded over again.

"That's what's so disgusting about this place," she said. "We are followed everywhere. I reckon they'll want to stop me from flying to Fiora."

Her fears were justified. The police spy drove after them into the enclosure, dogged them to the bureau, watched them while their passports were examined, waited until Hamilton had paid his air dues and satisfied his petrol bill; and then, just as Hamilton was handing Sadie into the plane, came forward, raised his hat and said—

"The Signor will pardon me for requesting to see his passport."

Hamilton thought of telling him to go to the devil; but reflecting that he must be a policeman, produced the passport and showed it to him. He examined it, and then said—

"The Signor is an Englishman?"

The Scot assented impatiently. It would take too long to explain that he was not.

"The Signorina, however, is American?" the inquisitor proceeded. He said it in the tone of the court inspector reading out a list of previous convictions.

"Yes, Signor, I am," answered Sadie. "What is the matter with that?"

The detective shrugged his shoulders.

"Will the Signorina be pleased to show her passport?"

Produced accordingly. The man took it, opened it, and without further scrutiny said—

"I regret to say that this passport is irregular. I must ask the Signorina to accompany me to the police bureau."

Tears of disappointment stood in Sadie's eyes; and then she lost her temper. In fluent American she denounced the police system of Regnum, asserted her God-given rights as a free American citizen, adverted to the life-long friendship subsisting between her father, John G. Reinhart, and the American President, declined to go one step in the direction of the police bureau, and finally snatched the passport from the bewildered official and restored it to the depths of her handbag.

She turned to Hamilton.

" You saw how clumsily it was done," she said. " The man never even looked at the passport, but said it was irregular in order to prevent me from flying to Fiora."

" Ah ! " exclaimed the detective. " The Signorina is flying only as far as Fiora ? "

" Yes," said Hamilton. " The Signorina has a desire to see the famous pictures at Fiora, and has asked me to take her by air to save time. As she has only a few more days in Regnum I have agreed to do so. We return this afternoon."

The policeman seemed immensely relieved.

" In that case, Signorina, there will be no objection to your travelling on your passport. But on your return I will ask you to hand it in to the police bureau for further scrutiny. I wish you, Signor e Signorina, a pleasant journey."

He raised his hat and turned away.

The roar of the engine prevented Sadie and Hamilton from comparing notes on the incident. To the Scot, however, it was as clear as day that war was about to be declared by Volscia ; that the Americans in Regnum were being shadowed in order to prevent as many as possible from leaving the country ; and that, but for his intervention, Sadie would almost certainly

have accompanied her father to an internment camp.

Considering how the old man had turned his blind eye to the warnings which shouted at him from every side, Hamilton was not going to waste any sympathy upon him. But so far as Sadie was concerned he now awoke to the realisation that he had actually kidnapped her, and was carrying her off from her father and depositing her in Paris without consulting her. And, having just heard her telling off the detective for getting in her way—having just seen his divinity for the first time in a very human passion—he began to experience a sinking feeling in the region of the diaphragm. He felt as he used to feel as a small boy awaiting cross-examination on a lesson which he had only imperfectly prepared.

CHAPTER TEN.

I.

THE first half-hour of the flight passed pleasantly enough. Sadie was happy to get away from Regnum, if only for a few hours. When she was not studying the landscape below them she gave him the most delightful smiles. He smiled back at her, but all the time was thinking hard. What was he going to say to her? That, of course, must depend largely on what she said to him. And after her argument with the detective he did not altogether look forward to it.

From time to time they passed little notes to each other, mainly about the towns, villages and rivers they were flying over. He named them as best he could for her benefit, and she was quite content. The calm before the storm was certainly enjoyable.

The first jar came when they had been travelling for about an hour. Sadie wrote—

“ When shall we sight Fiora ? ”

If he had been as strong-minded as he would like to have been, he would have told her then about their real destination. But she was so happy that he had not the heart to disillusion her—so he told himself. Anyhow, his reply was—

“ In about a quarter of an hour.”

Shortly afterwards they sighted the famous city, and Sadie, who was better read than most girls, was obviously thrilled. She looked out for its bridges, its castle and its cathedral, pointing them out to Hamilton as they came into view. His enthusiasm was tempered by the thought of what was coming.

They flew over Fiora at 125 miles an hour. Sadie now looked out eagerly for the aerodrome, which she assumed to be—as in fact it was—on the north side of the river.

“ Here we are ! ” she cried, pointing ahead.

Hamilton read her words from her lips and nodded, while he braced himself for the approaching ordeal. As they went over the aerodrome at full speed without any indication of turning or coming down, Sadie turned to him in amazement. Then she looked back at the pilot and made signs which, if he saw them, were completely ignored.

Sadie caught Hamilton by the arm, and shrieked

out to him excitedly. He smiled and affected not to understand her. Impatiently she seized her writing block and scribbled—

“ We are leaving Fiora behind. Why doesn’t the man descend ? ”

The trial of strength could no longer be delayed. Hamilton gritted his teeth and replied in his most deliberate and legible script—

“ We are bound for Paris ! ”

He watched her as she read it. She looked up at him with a puzzled expression, and then returned to the note, over which she bent her head for a minute or so. Again she looked at him, partly in anger and partly in fear. At last she scribbled—

“ What do you mean ? Why are we not stopping at Fiora ? ”

Here was a straightforward question. He replied—

“ Because you are not safe anywhere in Volscia ? ”

“ What about my father ? ”

“ I wanted your father to fly to Paris with you, but he wouldn’t.”

“ Does he know you are taking me to Paris ? ”

“ No.”

“ Then how dare you take me away from him without his permission or mine ? ”

This was a bit of a puzzler. He looked across at her while he was debating his reply. Her cheeks were scarlet, her eyes were daggers of blue steel, her pretty teeth were biting on her full underlip—whether through temper, or whether to keep back tears was more than he could say. He decided that there was no reason why he should not be frank. He wrote—

“Because if I had said anything about Paris you wouldn’t have come.”

This seemed to him so obvious that it might well have closed the discussion. But it did not. She seized her writing block and wrote with angry energy—

“I insist on returning to Regnum at once.”

His reply was—

“If you do you will be arrested to-morrow and sent to a war internment camp.”

How would she take that? She stared at the slip for a few moments, and then looked round her as if contrasting the freedom of the air with the bondage of a prison camp. Then she wrote what she felt to be the right thing in the circumstances—

“But you have left my father to go to prison.”

Reply: “Not my fault. He absolutely refused to come.”

She: "Well, anyway, I can't possibly leave him like this. I must insist on going back."

There was nothing for it but to put his foot down. He wrote—

"I will do anything else that you ask me, but not that."

She wrote pleadingly—

"Please do. I can't desert my father, especially at a time like this."

Reply: "Don't you think it will relieve your father to know that you are safely out of the country?"

Upon this she tried another tack.

"How do you know there is going to be a war?"

"From one of the best authorities in Paris."

"And if there isn't one?"

"Then I will fly you back to Regnum if you will let me, apologise to you and your father in dust and ashes, and take the next steamer back to India."

She read this without a smile, and the correspondence dropped. When he tried to revive it a little later, on a less controversial subject, she quietly declined. Later still, however, when he produced a luncheon basket, she helped him to dispose of its contents, and his hopes rose slightly. But she remained civilly aloof throughout the

remainder of the journey, and he could only conjecture that while she had reconciled herself to the inevitable, like a sensible young woman, she was as far as ever from being reconciled to the process of being kidnapped, or—a more important consideration—to the kidnapper.

He was glad to take his turn in the cockpit for an hour while the pilot-mechanic snatched a little food and rest.

II.

Paris was reached at six o'clock. Not a word had been exchanged between Hamilton and Sadie since lunch-time. Sadie's charming face was non-committal as he helped her to alight; but it wore its sweetest expression as she thanked the pilot for his skill and care, and handed him the equivalent of a month's wages as a tip.

Then, when they had moved a few yards away from the plane, he carrying her suitcase and his own, she stopped short, looked him full in the face, and said—

“Now that you have brought me here, what are you going to do with me?”

“I propose,” he answered, “to convey you to the hotel of my friends the Grüns, who were expecting both you and your father this evening,

and who will be delighted to put you up for as long as you like."

"That is good of you; but as I don't happen to know your friends the Grüns—and don't want to know them—I prefer to plank myself down on the doorstep of the American Embassy. I do know them, and I expect they will be willing to put me up until I can go back to father."

"Very well," he said quietly, "I will take you to the Embassy, if you will give me ten minutes to settle up with the pilot and see about a hangar. Can you wait?"

"Yes, I'll wait," she replied. "But while you are away I shall send a telegram to father."

Their eyes met, and hers said—

"And you may expect very little mercy when I do send it."

He bowed and turned away.

Sadie's wireless ran :—

"*To John G. Reinhart, Kreisler Hotel, Regnum.*

"Have landed here safely. The Fiora trip was a trick to get me out of Volscia. Am proceeding to American Embassy and will return to Regnum as soon as possible. Love, SADIE."

Having despatched her wireless, she found Hamilton waiting for her outside the telegraph

office. A taxi was chartered, in which they drove to the Embassy. It took them the best part of an hour to get there, after the usual terrifying race across Paris.

Late as it was the chancellerie was still open. Hamilton remained with Sadie while a message was sent to the Ambassador. Much to his relief the great man himself came down to take charge of her. Otherwise the dogged Scot would have stuck to her until he had seen her into the motherly care of Mrs Ambassador Walker. She had attempted to get rid of him as soon as they reached the chancellerie, but he had insisted on shepherding her into the diplomatic presence itself.

Consequently, when Wheeldon R. Walker, America's worthy representative, came into the room, she was forced to introduce Hamilton as her escort on the flight from Regnum. She was somewhat startled by his reception.

The Ambassador's handsome face lit up with pleasure, and he shook the young man's hand warmly.

"America owes you a debt of gratitude, Mr Hamilton," he said, "for bringing away this young lady from a capital which is, I am afraid, very unhealthy for our countrymen at the present time."

"Then there *is* going to be war?" cried Sadie, paling.

"My dear young lady, you relieve me by asking that question," Mr Walker replied. "I took you to be a refugee from Regnum because war had either broken out or was about to be declared. If you are ignorant on the point, possibly the situation may not be so bad as is feared. Where is your father, Miss Reinhart?"

"Still in Regnum," she faltered.

She was frightened by the gravity of the Ambassador's words, and ashamed of her resentment against Hamilton. As a fair-minded girl she must make amends.

"Mr Hamilton placed his plane at our disposal this morning," she added, "and only brought me away by myself when father refused his offer."

"Ah! A modern Lochinvar!" smiled the Ambassador. "Did your father send you away?"

"No," she murmured. "Mr Hamilton decoyed me into his plane on the pretence that we were only going as far as Fiora. And I was mad when I found out he had deceived me. I now see he had some reason for what he did. All the same, Ambassador, I want to get back to father just as quick as I can. Will you and Mrs Walker give

me shelter for to-night, and let me start back to Regnum to-morrow ? ”

“ You will certainly stay with us to-night, and as many nights as you wish,” he replied. “ But as for starting back to Regnum to-morrow, I think we had better wait until we see what to-morrow brings forth.”

“ Then you think, sir, we are in for it ? ” asked Hamilton.

“ We must hope for the best,” was the reply. “ War hasn’t yet been declared, but there are persistent rumours that it is going to be. Stocks collapsed on the Bourse yesterday afternoon, and have gone even lower to-day. The money market as usual knows more than the Corps Diplomatique. And as usual it prefers to keep its knowledge to itself.”

“ Well, sir, I will now take my leave,” said Hamilton. “ Good night, Miss Reinhart. I hope you have forgiven me, at least partially.”

Sadie smiled like her old self.

“ I was mad at you this afternoon,” she said, “ because it seemed like deserting poor old dad at a pinch. However, I do think you meant well by us both, and I have laid all the blame on you in my telegram to Regnum.”

" You've telegraphed to Regnum ? " asked the Ambassador.

" Yes, I sent a wireless from the landing ground when we arrived."

" It will be interesting to see whether it reaches Mr Reinhart," commented the Ambassador.

CHAPTER ELEVEN.

I.

MR REINHART did not expect Sadie back much before dinner-time. When dinner was over, and she had not appeared, he grew anxious. Accompanied by Wilbraham Bright he went to the Central Telegraph Office, and despatched a wireless to the Vittoria Hotel in Fiora—the hostelry to which Americans mostly resorted. It was a bow drawn at a venture. There were, however, many possibilities to account for Sadie's non-appearance, and one of them was that she and her escort had elected to stay in Fiora for the night, owing to trouble with their plane or because of the fascinations of the place.

The telegram was never sent, but neither Reinhart nor Bright was to know this. As they walked back to the hotel Wilbraham Bright drew the American's attention to one curious fact. The streets were absolutely bare of soldiers. In the

ordinary way they swarmed everywhere. To-night there was not a single military uniform to be seen.

It was the 30th of June, and the atmosphere was intolerably sultry. The political atmosphere also seemed charged with electricity. Wilbraham Bright, who had found himself in the midst of more than one revolution, was ready to stake his reputation on the certainty that some catastrophe was impending. All the signs pointed to war. The Bourses of Europe had collapsed. The Volscian press, which had been baying against America for months, had grown suddenly silent. The Dictator, whom he had seen daily, had become moody, taciturn and even gloomy. Bright knew these as certain indications that he was on the point of taking a vital step. The complete disappearance of soldiers from the streets clinched the matter to his mind. War was now only a question of hours.

By ten o'clock Mr Reinhart was in the grip of a horrible fear. Sadie and Hamilton must have crashed. He cursed himself for having entrusted his child to the care of a man who probably knew far less about flying than he himself did—to Hamilton, in fact, and to a reckless French pilot-mechanic. Wilbraham Bright tried to comfort him by telephoning to the newspaper offices

and asking if they had heard of any air accident between Regnum and Fiora. Although he was well known in all of them, he was met with a gruff refusal to give any information whatever.

At eleven o'clock Mr Reinhart received Sadie's wireless from Paris. His relief was immense. Wilbraham Bright was with him when the message arrived, and smiled when it was handed to him to read. So the young Indian Civilian had taken charge and had carried off the girl!

He glanced at the date, and saw that the message had been handed in five hours previously.

"They've taken their time about transmitting this telegram," he observed. "Possibly there may have been a block in the traffic, but if that is so, what is the reason of it? Service messages—mobilisation?"

Mr Reinhart, relieved as to Sadie's safety, now turned to the political aspect of the message.

"I ought to have suspected Hamilton after the way in which he badgered me this morning to fly with Sadie to Paris," he said. "But the fact is I was so glad to get her out of Regnum for a few hours that I didn't worry about him."

"Well, now she is out, I take it she had better stay away," said Wilbraham Bright. "This message, which has, of course, been held up for

the Dictator to see, has undoubtedly placed you both on the Volscian black list."

"We can hardly be more on the black list than we are, judging from the way we have been harassed," answered Mr Reinhart. "But you are probably in the right. It is better that Sadie shouldn't come back to Regnum just now. Are you on for another stroll to the Central Telegraph Office?"

Wilbraham Bright agreed, and the two men walked through the semi-deserted lounge to the door.

As they passed through it they were startled to observe that it was guarded by soldiers. A non-commissioned officer, who was standing almost in the doorway, barred their egress and roughly ordered them, in Volscian, to return to the hotel.

"What does this mean?" exclaimed Bright indignantly. "I am an Englishman, and refuse to be kept a prisoner for no rhyme or reason."

The soldier knew not a word of English, and if he had it would have made no difference. He had evidently had his orders, and was determined to carry them out. He pointed with his bayonet in the direction of the lounge, and the two friends, seeing the hopelessness of escape, turned back and re-entered it.

"I don't like the look of things," said Bright.
"But come up to my room and have a drink."

Mr Reinhart followed him in silence to the elevator, cursing himself for having rejected Hamilton's proposition of the morning, but blessing him for his enterprise in getting Sadie out of the way. Whatever might be in store for her father, Sadie was safe. How he wished he could have sent off that wireless to Paris!

The two men sat talking till midnight. Neither of them had any doubt that war was about to be declared, and they compared notes on possible developments. Wilbraham Bright had been in Paris in 1914, when the Germans invaded Belgium. He remembered, as though it were only yesterday, the feeling of helplessness that came over him when these tremendous armies were set in motion. It was like being in an earthquake. One seemed to be in the presence of elemental forces which were bent on destroying civilisation.

He had the same feeling now. Everything was once more being drawn into the vortex. The future seemed a nightmare, from the contemplation of which it was nevertheless impossible to turn away. The two men sat conversing almost in whispers, as if they were afraid to voice the appalling possibilities.

Twelve o'clock struck. They were loath to separate—men are often like sheep, huddling together for warmth and safety in any crisis.

Five minutes afterwards they heard the ominous tramp of armed men along the passage. It halted outside Wilbraham Bright's door, and a word of command rang out, followed by the clash of rifle-butts on the floor.

The next moment the door was flung open and a Volscian officer, accompanied by three men with fixed bayonets, entered. Bright and Reinhart rose to their feet. The officer saluted politely enough, and then, without any preliminaries, asked in broken English—

“ Which of you is John G. Reinhart ? ”

Mr Reinhart bowed.

“ I have come to arrest you,” said the officer. “ Will you put on your hat and coat and come with me.”

II.

Although both men were more or less prepared for it, this rough and peremptory demand got Mr Reinhart's ‘goat.’

“ Sir,” he said, “ this is an outrage upon an American citizen. I protest against it in the

name of my country, and I warn you that whoever is responsible will suffer for it."

The officer turned to Wilbraham Bright.

" You, Signor, are an Englishman, are you not? What is your name? "

Bright gave him the name and added—

" I am an Englishman, and I also protest in the name of my country against this outrage. Who and what is your authority for arresting my friend? "

The officer smiled insolently and slapped the hilt of his sword.

" This is my authority," he said, " and it must suffice both for you and your friend."

" Do you propose to arrest me also? "

" By no means, Signor. We have no quarrel with England—at present. Our quarrel is only with America."

" War, then, has been declared? " This from Mr Reinhart.

" That I do not know."

" What! " exclaimed the American. " There has been no declaration of war, and yet an innocent American citizen is dragged to prison by armed force! Have you gone mad? "

The officer shrugged his shoulders. " I have nothing further to say," he replied. " I have my orders, which are to arrest every American

in this hotel. You will be good enough to be in the lounge under escort, and with any belongings that can be carried in a handbag, in ten minutes."

He turned on his heel and, leaving two soldiers as an escort for Mr Reinhart, he led his party farther along the corridor, presumably to seize the persons of other Americans.

Mr Reinhart looked at his watch. "A quarter after midnight," he said. "That means that I must be in the lounge by half-past."

He was about to go to his room when one of the escort stopped him, making signs that he must remain where he was. Reinhart looked helplessly at Bright.

"It looks as if I mayn't get myself a suit of pyjamas," he said.

"I'll get you what you want," said the Englishman, who knew the number of the room.

"That's very kind of you," was the grateful reply. "You'll find my Japanese servant in the room. Tell him to throw a couple of shirts and toothbrushes and a lounge suit into the smallest suitcase he has; and if you'll take this key and bring me my wallet and Sadie's jewel-case from the safe let into the wall I'll be eternally obliged to you. Give the Jap two hundred pounds to go on with."

Wilbraham Bright did as he was asked. Sure enough he found the Japanese valet in Mr Reinhart's room. The Japanese showed no surprise at Bright's entry, or at the sum of money which was presently entrusted to him ; but with rapid and noiseless efficiency he packed the suitcase as ordered, and had it ready in five minutes.

Accompanied by the valet Bright then returned to his own room. He had been absent less than ten minutes. Mr Reinhart was busy writing when he arrived. Presently he sealed the letter on which he had been engaged, and handed it to Bright.

"That," he said, "is an order on my agents in London authorising them to advance to little Sadie up to twenty thousand sterling. Will you, like the good fellow you are, see it delivered to them, and let Sadie have her jewel-case ?"

Wilbraham Bright agreed, and handed over the wallet. These preliminaries had hardly been completed when the escort, who were evidently getting impatient, fell in on either side of the prisoner and signed to him to march. The valet tried to follow him, carrying his valise. He was promptly turned back, and Mr Reinhart was compelled to carry his own suitcase.

The little party, with Wilbraham Bright following in the rear, then made its way downstairs to

the lounge, the soldiers scorning to use the lift. It encountered two other American prisoners, similarly escorted, on the way.

It was now half-past twelve, and if any of the ordinary habitués had been in the lounge they had evidently been sent away. The lounge, clear of all other traffic, had been converted at a moment's notice into a kind of prisoners' clearing-house.

When Mr Reinhart and Wilbraham Bright reached it they found between thirty and forty Americans, of both sexes and all ages, grouped together in a corner. Senator and Mrs Westerhout were among them. More than a third of them were ladies, who were sitting down. The men preferred to stand. Several of them had a huddled look, as though they had been roused out of sleep. Most, however, were in evening dress. Each carried a handbag of sorts, and all looked bewildered and indignant. They talked together in excited whispers, and one or two of the younger generation—there was one blond giant standing six feet four—were obviously being restrained with difficulty from resorting to physical resistance.

More than half the hall was occupied by a full company of soldiers with fixed bayonets. They were grouped behind a small table at which sat

a captain, writing, and occasionally comparing lists with two junior officers. One of these was the same who had irrupted into Bright's room twenty minutes before. The captain looked more debonair than either of his lieutenants. He was small and dapper, smiling and sleek-haired, with a perfect command of English.

In five minutes more all the Americans in the hotel had been rounded up. There were some fifty of them all told. The captain ran his eye over them, smiled, and rose to his feet.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I will ask you kindly to answer to your names."

He proceeded to read from his list, checking it as each unfortunate answered to his or her name. When he came to "Bryan S. Westerhout," that statesman stepped forward amidst an intense silence.

"Captain," he said, "I am a member of the United States Senate. I came to this country on a mission of the utmost importance in the hope of settling the differences between Volscia and America. Your Dictator has refused to meet me, and now has added injury to insult by causing me to be dragged from my bed by a posse of soldiers and haled to prison together with all these my fellow-countrymen, without explanation or accusation. In the name of the United States

I protest against this barbarous treatment. I denounce the author of it, and I promise him that America will exact a memorable retribution from all those who have been parties to it."

He sat down and mopped his brow. The captain smiled and said—

" You, then, are Mr Bryan S. Westerhout ? "

" I am," answered the Senator in his trumpet-like tones.

The captain continued to call out names until his list was exhausted. Then he put it in his pocket, and addressed the Americans.

" Ladies and gentlemen," he said, " it gives me very great personal distress to be compelled to put you to this trouble and inconvenience. But I am only acting in obedience to orders from the Volscian Government. Those orders are to arrest the American citizens who have been staying in this hotel and convey them to an internment camp which has been formed outside the city. I hope it may not be necessary to detain you in internment for very long. While you are there, however, you will occupy the status of prisoners of war, and will be subject to strict discipline and curtailment of liberties. You will now pass out of the front door of the hotel, marching two and two. Automobiles are in waiting outside to convey you to your destination. I have the

honour to wish you, ladies and gentlemen, a comfortable journey and a not too long term of imprisonment."

The prisoners at once began to move to the door. Wilbraham Bright, filled with concern for Mr Reinhart and the Westerhouts, went up to them and asked them if there was anything he could do for them.

"Get in touch with Sadie, my dear friend," said Mr Reinhart, "and let each of us know what happens to the other. I can't imagine that this absurd detention is going to last very long."

"Mr Bright," said the Senator, "I trust that as a British journalist you will tell the world about this infamous violation of treaty rights and the comity of nations. Be good enough to convey to my country and to the world at large my confidence that they will not fail to exact penalties from this guilty nation and from the tyrant who now governs it."

"Mr Senator," interposed the captain, who had heard every word of the dialogue, "I must ask you to refrain from any aspersions upon the Volscian Dictator. Such aspersions are an insult not only to him but to the nation which has chosen him for its leader. I repeat, I regret the inconvenience to which you and your country-

men are being put, but I warn you that no good can come from abusing the Dictator."

He saluted as the Senator and his wife passed out through the front door. Then he turned to Wilbraham Bright.

" You are an English journalist ? " he asked.

" I am."

" Good. I advise you to be extremely careful as to what you say about this morning's events."

Bright acknowledged the counsel with a bow. He waited until the last of the procession had left the hotel, and then, going out by himself, he walked in a direction which would have surprised the captain had he seen it. He made straight for the Palazzo of the Dictator, picking up a prowling taxi by the way.

CHAPTER TWELVE.

I.

THE Palazzo, when Wilbraham Bright drove up to it, was brilliantly lit up, as it only was for a reception or a revolution. Never, indeed, had Bright seen it so busy. Motor-cars and bicycles came dashing up to it or rushed away from it. The ante-rooms on the ground-floor were also in a state of commotion. Secretaries were seated at telephones, holding earnest long-distance conversations; orders and messages were being shouted out, messengers were coming and going.

The Palazzo was more strongly guarded than usual. Wilbraham Bright presently found himself undergoing the hostile scrutiny of the officer of the guard.

"The Dictator can see no one to-night," he said curtly, when the Englishman mentioned his business. "The Signor must wait until the morning."

"Impossible. I am English, my name is Wilbraham Bright, and I am an old friend of His Excellency. If he is disengaged, I feel sure he will see me at once."

The officer still eyed him suspiciously. Eventually, however, he decided that Bright had no weapons concealed about his evening dress; that an elderly Englishman of good address was not likely to be an assassin; and finally that he might be allowed inside the building.

Once inside he was passed from ante-room to ante-room, all strongly guarded, until he came to Andreas' confidential secretary, who knew him personally.

"Be seated, Signor Bright," he said—the first courteous greeting vouchsafed to him that night—"His Excellency will see you almost immediately."

Wilbraham Bright sat down accordingly, and, while he waited for his summons, continued to turn over in his mind two significant remarks let fall by the captain of the arresting party while addressing the prisoners at the hotel.

The first was—" *I hope it may not be necessary to detain you in internment for very long.*"

The second—" *While you are there, however, you will occupy the status of prisoners of war.*"

These two observations, taken together, made

him wonder whether war had, in fact, been declared. If it was war, how could the Volscian officer set a term to its duration, or limit the period of the internment? Again, the Americans at the hotel were not classified apparently as prisoners of war, but were only to have the 'status' of war prisoners. Was it possible, then, that they had been seized, not as an incident at the outset of a Volscio-American war, but as a police measure resting on no other sanction than the will of the man in the adjoining room?

It was hardly conceivable; but nothing nowadays was impossible, especially with the Latin temperament. Wilbraham Bright cudgelled his brains in an effort to recall any historical precedent for such a measure. Something of the kind had happened before, he felt sure, but the details eluded him.

II.

"His Excellency will see you now, Signor," said the Secretary.

Martin Andreas was pacing up and down when Bright was admitted. There was a glitter in his cold grey eye and a pursed-up expression

about his firm mouth which also spoke of strong excitement. He looked more Napoleonic than ever as he paced the room with his head sunk between his shoulders and his hands clasped behind his back.

He turned towards the door as Wilbraham Bright came in. His greeting was unusually effusive.

"Welcome, my friend!" he exclaimed. "I have been expecting you. It is fitting that you should be the first to know the truth about a development which will take the world by storm to-morrow."

They seated themselves and began to smoke. The Dictator was more strongly moved than Bright had ever seen him. He was habitually moderate in the use of tobacco, as in all his other personal habits. Now he smoked cigarette after cigarette with feverish haste.

"This," he said, "is the 1st of July—the day on which Volscian policy gathers up all its forces and strikes a decisive blow for Volscian—nay, more, for European freedom."

Wilbraham Bright made no reply. Andreas was in his most irritable and most unreasonable mood—a mood in which he wanted to do all the talking, yet counted on his hearer to do his share.

" You have seen a number of arrests at your hotel ? " he proceeded.

Bright nodded affirmatively.

" And that is why you have come here to see me ? "

" Your Excellency is right again," answered the Englishman.

" Every American in Volscia has been arrested by this time," continued the Dictator.

Wilbraham Bright raised his eyebrows.

" That, I take it, means war with America ? " he commented.

" By no means—not unless America declares it."

" Then Volscia has not yet gone to war ? "

" No."

" In that case, Your Excellency, what occasion or excuse have you for such an outrageous proceeding as these wholesale arrests ? "

" I require no excuse," said the Dictator haughtily. " The occasion is a legitimate development of Volscian policy, which is the freeing of Volscia, and incidentally of Europe, from the economic and financial slavery in which we have all been held by America during the last twenty years."

There was silence for a minute or two. Wilbraham Bright was beginning to piece the puzzle,

but the solution was so repellent and fantastic that he could not bring himself to accept it.

"I must confess," he replied at length, "I fail to see how such an unprecedented violation of Volscian hospitality is going to free anyone."

"You are wrong in describing it as unprecedented," replied Andreas angrily.

"Perhaps I was. I was trying to think of a precedent a few minutes ago, but couldn't."

"Surely you haven't forgotten the rupture of the Amiens Treaty in 1803, and Napoleon's wholesale arrests of English residents in France? He kept them there, if I remember rightly, for ten or eleven years."

Wilbraham Bright fairly gasped. He sat looking at the other for several minutes, trying to reconcile the outrage which he had witnessed and the policy which had just been laid down with his friendship with the man who sat before him. Andreas grew restive under his scrutiny, and eventually continued--

"You see I have historical precedent on my side. And now, if you have sufficiently recovered from your astonishment, I will lay before you the policy of which this morning's arrests are the spearhead."

After a brief pause he went on.

"You know as well as I do—it is a point we

discussed in this room only a day or two ago—that the commercial and fiscal policy of America is actively hostile to the interests of Europe. America has selfishly monopolised the world's gold, and has thereby caused a catastrophic decline in prices all over the world."

"Don't forget that France has done nearly as much as America to corner gold."

Andreas looked uneasy for a moment, and went on—

"I am not discussing France just now. France is able to look after herself."

"Very much so," Wilbraham Bright agreed.

"Apart from the gold question," said the Dictator, "America is draining the lifeblood of Europe—and particularly of Volscia—by her continued insistence upon repayment of the War Debt. Her greed is insatiable and shameless. She is the Shylock of the nations. Unless the grip of this international usurer can be shaken off, Volscia certainly, and Europe probably, will collapse.

"The time has come, Bright, when Volscia at least must strike a blow for her freedom. You have described it as a violent blow and as an outrage—possibly it is—but all is fair in love and war and an intolerable international situation. Therefore, as I have said, I do not

admit the slightest necessity of any excuse for the action I have now taken. I have not the least doubt that it will be endorsed by my own people; and, if it is looked at broadly, I believe it will be accepted by the United States of Europe as an act of legitimate financial restitution."

"What, then, is your object in making these arrests?"

Andreas consulted a paper on his table.

"There were yesterday nearly five hundred Americans in Volscia," he said, "among them a dozen multi-millionaires, a United States Senator, two representatives and sundry members of State legislatures. I have a steel king, an oil king and a copper king now in custody. In fact there are almost as many American kings interned in Volscia as there are crowned heads in Europe. There are also bankers, railroad presidents and a number of other exponents of 'big business.' The rest are comparatively honest people."

He thought for a moment, and then said—

"I have a good mind to let the small fry go, and only hold the big men to ransom. What do you think, Bright? Would it have a good effect in America—and also in Europe, for that is also important?"

"To ransom!" exclaimed Wilbraham Bright.

"Then Volscia has become a brigand State, with highway robbery as its policy?"

The Dictator frowned.

"That is an absolutely conventional and—if I may say so—English way of looking at it," he said. "You may call it brigandage if you like, but it is no more brigandage than the American policy of holding the world to ransom over the War Debts. It is no more brigandage than the business methods of many of the men I have now interned. If you will take off your English blinkers and look facts in the face, every man who holds up his fellows for money is a brigand. Your stockjobber, your oil monopolist, your successful business man everywhere is a man who screws money out of his fellow-creatures because he is able to hold a pistol to their heads. I have no doubt, Bright, that you yourself regard your own Government as a brigand when it forces you to pay tribute under the guise of income tax. My only innovation is that I am enforcing tribute from a set of foreigners."

III.

Andreas was one of those men who can lash themselves into a fever of moral indignation, or talk themselves into a state of genuine conviction whatever the issue. Wilbraham decided to interrupt the process.

"What is the nature of the tribute you purpose to exact?" he asked.

"Cancellation of the entire Volscian Debt to America," answered the Dictator, "together with a cash indemnity of seventy-five millions sterling to be paid in gold."

Bright was becoming immune to shocks.

"The Volscian War Debt is less than two hundred millions sterling," he pointed out. "For the sake of two hundred and fifty millions Volscia is to face war with America and the scorn and loathing of the entire world."

"As regards war with America, I think you exaggerate the position," said Andreas. "A very little consideration will show you that America is in a cleft stick. With all her resources she can't make war three thousand miles from her base. Her only chance of bringing Volscia to book would be by obtaining a base somewhere in Europe—or possibly by making

an alliance with your own country. I feel pretty certain that the United States of Europe would put their foot down on the first proposition; and somehow I don't see Britain agreeing to the second."

"I can imagine a more impossible combination," said the Englishman drily.

"I cannot," was the brusque reply.

"As to the United States of Europe—will there be a United States of Europe after this?" asked Bright.

"If there isn't, Volscia will be no worse off than before. But there is one country, at all events, which won't—which can't—repudiate us, and that is France."

"Ah!" Bright's exclamation spoke volumes.

The Dictator bit his lip.

"You are also mistaken," he went on somewhat hastily, "in supposing that I am doing this merely to rake in so much money. I am doing it to pay off old scores. As I have told you before, America has insulted us hitherto with impunity. Now the laugh will be on our side."

"How can you possibly say that?" asked Bright. "Do you imagine that a great nation—the greatest and most powerful in the world—is going to tolerate such treatment from any

Power in Europe? Hasn't it occurred to you that there must be some means of getting at you, and that if there are any means whatever America will try them? Take the weapon of retaliatory measures?"

"There again I have her cold—is not that the expression?" chuckled the Dictator. "There are so many Volscians in America that it is impossible to think of shutting them up. No, Bright, the President and his people have only two alternatives before them—to pay up, or to leave their nationals in our internment camps indefinitely."

"This is utter madness," said Bright, rising. "Andreas, you have hitherto served your country well. Don't ruin yourself and Volscia—don't make the Volscian name stink in the nostrils of Europe. You haven't yet gone too far. Cancel your orders now, and I shall think of you and write of you as the first statesman in Europe."

The Dictator also arose. His face was paler than usual, and there was agitation in his manner.

"Thank you, Bright," he replied, "but there can be no going back. I have waited for this moment for years—and so has Volscia. If the truth were known so also has Europe. I will lower the pride of America or I will break myself in the attempt. Good-bye—and put the best

interpretation you can upon what you have heard."

"Good-bye, Andreas—I'm sorry for all of us," responded Wilbraham Bright, as he shook hands and turned to go.

As he passed through the secretary's room, a tall man in evening dress strode in. He was middle-aged and rubicund, with thick black hair, a black moustache and piercing black eyes which glittered with fury. Wilbraham Bright, who knew him by sight only, made way for him civilly as he entered the room. He took no notice of the Englishman, but marched up to the secretary's table, and without a word handed him a card.

The secretary looked up, and Bright saw him wince under the visitor's fierce scrutiny. He sprang to his feet, handed him a chair which he declined, and then disappeared into the Dictator's room.

It was the American Ambassador.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN.

I.

THERE being no air transport available, Wilbraham Bright left Regnum by rail at seven o'clock that morning. As soon as he had passed the Volscian frontier he sent a message to Lord Rotherham, the Foreign Secretary, briefly describing the *coup-d'état*, and adding that he hoped to be in England the following day.

On the way to Paris he wrote a note to Sadie at the American Embassy, which he posted while taxi-ing to the Gare du Nord. He explained that he was called to London on urgent business, but hoped to return to Paris in a few days. He added that her father was safe and well, though in confinement; that she need have no anxiety on his account; that he hoped the whole vexatious incident would be closed in the course of a week or so; and finally, that her father's agents in

London would keep her abundantly supplied with money.

In Paris he met the first repercussions of Andreas' aggression. The early editions of the evening papers mentioned the wholesale arrests of Americans in Volscia as a rumour lacking confirmation. The rumour, however, was given the utmost prominence in the news pages, and was starred on the posters.

At Calais he saw the London afternoon papers, which had the main outlines of the story, and had made the most of it.

“VOLSCIA BREAKS ALL RECORDS
WHOLESALE ROUND-UP OF AMERICAN TOURISTS
DICTATOR OUTDOES NAPOLEONIC TREACHERY”

was how the ‘Strand Gazette’ (Conservative) headed the sensation.

At least these were its main heads. It went on, however, to back them up by dozens of lesser captions, which told the story without putting the reader to the trouble of studying the text.

The ‘Westminster Journal’ (Labour) went a little further—

“AN ACT PROVOCATIVE OF WAR?
UNPARALLELED AFFRONT TO U.S.A.
ARREST OF EVERY AMERICAN IN VOLSCIA.”

And so on. There was no editorial comment in either case. He missed his connection, and had to wait for the first steamer in the morning.

The morning papers afforded him exciting reading between Dover and London. First of all he turned to the commercial pages. All the markets had reacted more or less violently to a shock greater than had been inflicted on them for a quarter of a century. Half of them had closed. A moratorium had been proclaimed in France and Germany, and other countries were preparing to follow suit.

The newspapers contained the full story of the raid, but nothing that was new to him—except a pronouncement by Andreas avowing his deed and setting forth the terms on which his prisoners would be released.

Then Wilbraham Bright turned to the editorials. That in the 'Times' was well up to its own high standard—well weighed, temperate but unhesitatingly condemnatory of Volscian treachery.

While the writer spoke out plainly on the heinousness of the Dictator's conduct, he recognised the tactical strength of Volscia's position.

"It is easier to point out the desirability of punishment for such an outrage upon international comity," the article proceeded, "than to indicate how that punishment is to be inflicted. The United

States of Europe are rendered helpless by their constitution. The United States of America are still more helpless by reason of geographical conditions."

The '*Times*' concluded: "Difficult—nay, intolerable as the situation is, we refuse to believe that the honour of Europe is so completely in pawn, or that its statesmanship is so bankrupt in resources, as to permit any State within its orbit to adopt a policy of brigandage with impunity."

"Very proper indeed," thought Wilbraham Bright; "but not of much assistance to America or to anyone else."

The '*Watch*' and the '*Hustler*' afforded him a quiet amusement. It was perfectly clear that their noble owners were privately in sympathy with the Dictator; his unscrupulousness naturally appealed to them. But it was equally obvious that they were not sure how their three and a half million readers would take his latest performance. While they waited for the guidance of their letter bag they were sitting uneasily on the fence. They did not reprehend the raid out and out; they mildly hinted that it might have been stage-managed a little more tactfully. While they expressed their sympathy with the individual victims of Andreas' policy, they did

not forget to rub in how largely the debt and currency policy of America had alienated European sympathy.

The best English newspapers, however, made no bones about it. They denounced the outrage, but seemed equally at a loss to suggest a remedy.

II.

Wilbraham Bright arrived at Charing Cross a little after ten o'clock, and drove straight to Lord Rotherham's house in Carlton House Terrace. He took the chance of catching the Foreign Secretary before he set out for Whitehall; for once there he feared that he would be swamped by ambassadors and other important visitors, and that his unofficial emissary might have to wait an unconscionable time before seeing him.

Lord Rotherham was in, fortunately, and Wilbraham Bright, as an old friend, was admitted at once to the library, where this indefatigable worker was discovered knee-deep in official papers. His private secretary, who had been sitting close to him, rose and made way for the journalist, retiring to a smaller table at a little distance from his superior.

The Marquis of Rotherham, as he rose somewhat

stiffly to welcome Bright, looked, as indeed he was, an English statesman of the first rank. He was well over fifty ; his brown hair, though thinning at the top, was untouched with grey ; and his queer little side-whiskers, so small as to be little more than tufts of hair, were still a rich reddish brown. The face was one which no one who saw it at close quarters could ever forget. It was broad as well as long, especially the forehead. The eyes, set widely apart, were a bright hazel, and the pupils dilated and contracted like those of an eagle. The nose was aquiline and sensitive ; the mouth was wide and firm. The chin was less prominent than the forehead, without being by any means small.

As to his physique Lord Rotherham was well over the middle height, his broad shoulders making him perhaps appear shorter than he actually was. But this suggestion of physical strength was deceptive. He was a martyr both to weakness and suffering. His will and courage, however, were so magnificent as to carry him through a working day which often extended to eighteen hours, and that without other people suspecting that he was anything but physically fit.

By almost universal consent he was the ablest, and therefore perhaps one of the least popular, of British statesmen. He had served his country

in Parliament and abroad. He had held the highest office in India, where he had remodelled the administration and had incurred more hatred than any of his predecessors. He had held the foreign seals once before, and had negotiated at least three important treaties. Yet many people were set against him by his very brilliancy and success. This was partly due to his manner, and this again was due to his spinal trouble ! His manner was stiff because his back refused to bend, and the tradition grew that Rotherham was conceited and aloof. The tradition was remote from the fact, but—

“ to some kinds of men
Their virtues serve them but as enemies ! ”

Only a few months before he had suffered the bitterest rebuff of his career. The Premiership fell vacant, and his claims to the post were incontestable ; but they were cast aside on the pretext that he was a peer.

“ There have been peer-Premiers before, and there will be peer-Premiers again—when I am dead,” was his bitter comment.

But he was a philosopher as well as a statesman, and he bowed to the inevitable. His tenure of the Foreign Office was memorable for difficulties overcome, crises met coolly and

successfully. No one would have imagined, from his air of unconcern as he rose to greet Wilbraham Bright, that he was now face to face with the greatest problem of his whole career.

III.

"My dear Bright," he said in a pleasant baritone as they shook hands, "I can't congratulate you on your Volscian acquaintances. The man Andreas is a deadly shot, but he is no sportsman; he only goes for the easiest game."

Wilbraham Bright was familiar with his friend's whimsical openings.

"Do you consider, then, that 'God's own country' is an easy proposition?" he asked as he sat down.

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of America for the moment. I was thinking of his deadly practice against the League of Nations and the United States of Europe. Right and left barrel—he has got them both. It is the quickest bit of wanton slaughter I have ever seen."

"The League of Nations, yes," said Bright. "That has fallen to his gun right enough. But aren't you a little previous about the United States of Europe?"

"I admit it hasn't collapsed just yet," answered Lord Rotherham, "but I don't see how it can possibly survive this attack on its credit. The countries of Europe must repudiate Volscia—or be classed as potential brigands by the rest of the world."

"I don't imagine France will repudiate Volscia," said Wilbraham Bright.

"I think I know why you say that—because French finance is in with Volscian diplomacy—save the mark!"

"I believe—I have reason to believe—that that is so."

"Wheeler claimed to have found out something of the sort the other day," continued the Foreign Minister. "I can quite believe, of course, that France has been anxious to divert attention from her own cornering of gold. Well, if that is so, it ties up France to a very great extent. But not Germany."

"Germany! After her own performances during the greater part of the present century!"

"Don't forget," said Lord Rotherham, "that the crimes of Germany before and during the war were those of the Prussian Junker. The Republic is civilised. Besides, the Germans like the Americans. They will be with us, whoever is not. Now tell me, Bright—this is where you

come in—what is the real position in Volscia ? Are the Volscians behind Andreas in this affair ? ”

“ I believe they are behind him whatever he does—so long as he keeps Volscia on top,” replied Wilbraham Bright. “ The general enthusiasm for him is intense, and was in exact proportion to the popular hatred for America. So far as I could see, he has the army in his pocket.”

“ And he himself is determined to carry this business through ? ”

“ I had a talk with him before the arrests were an hour old,” said Bright. “ I urged the madness of his policy, and pointed out that it wasn’t even then too late to draw back. But he wouldn’t hear of any halting. Said he would either humble America, or himself be broken.”

“ His unfortunate country not mattering a hang one way or the other, I suppose ! Napoleon to the life—even in his treacheries ! Well, Bright, you have reassured me as to the rightness of my message to the British Ambassador in Regnum.”

“ May one ask what it was ? ”

“ Of course. Renshaw has been instructed to demand his passports after six days.”

“ I’m very glad to hear it.”

“ But meanwhile the Admiralty have sent a battleship, with an attendant flotilla, to Vien-

naso, where the American Ambassador will embark—his passports were already made out when he called on the Dictator to protest! And if the American Government will accept the offer, its representative will be conveyed to New York under the *ægis* of the Union Jack!"

"My dear Rotherham! That, if I may say so, is a master-stroke."

"It is at least a first-rate gesture," the Foreign Secretary admitted with complacency. He was human enough to delight in commendation. "That is, of course, provided the Americans accept the offer. If they don't, I suppose it will be another of my first-class blunders."

"If they don't they will be greater fools than I take them to be," said Wilbraham Bright. "It is the last thing Andreas is bargaining for."

He repeated the gist of Andreas' remarks about Great Britain.

"If he has banked on British neutrality," said Lord Rotherham, "he has put his money—if I may vary the metaphor—on what may easily prove to be the wrong horse."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN.

I.

WHEN the news of the Volscian outrage burst upon Paris, it aroused mingled feelings in Sadie Reinhart. In the first place, it showed her that Hamilton had been right, and that she and her father had been wrong as to the danger of remaining in Regnum. In the second place, it made her long to be with her father in his imprisonment. In the third place, it rekindled her resentment against the officious friendship which had snatched her away from her rightful place at her father's side. In the fourth place, it fed her secret elation that a young Englishman—or Scotsman, the distinction was immaterial—should have dared to carry her off in the teeth of her own protests, obviously because he was sufficiently fond of her to place her personal safety above every other consideration. Even if she had not

liked him, the boldness of it would have appealed to her.

Nevertheless it will be seen that for one reason why she should be pleased with Hamilton there were at least three why she should be mortally offended with him. Mr Wheeldon R. Walker, the Ambassador, did not improve matters by his handling of the situation.

As soon as the arrests were confirmed, he sought out Sadie in Mrs Walker's drawing-room. The Ambassador was obviously labouring under powerful emotion. His face was pale, and his lips were compressed.

"Miss Reinhart," he said, "your father and five hundred other Americans have been made the victims of an unparalleled outrage."

Sadie grew pale and her hands clenched.

"Has dad been killed?" she exclaimed.

"No, no, my dear, it isn't as bad as that. But every American in Volscia has been imprisoned by order of the Dictator, and an enormous monetary demand has been made on the American Government by way of ransom."

"War has been declared, then?"

"No, that's the amazing thing. The two countries are still nominally at peace."

"But surely our country must go to war now?" said Sadie, the colour coming back into

her cheeks and an angry light shining in her eyes.

"Steps must, of course, be taken to bring Volscia to book and to free our countrymen," answered the Ambassador. "The whole thing is so unheard of that it makes it all the more difficult. But the matter is not one only for America. The United States of Europe must take it up, or be branded with the Volscian stigma."

Sadie was not listening to him. She was thinking of her father.

"Couldn't I get back to him?"

"Back to Regnum, child? What would be the use of that? It would simply give Volscia another hostage without helping your father. On the contrary, it would only increase his distress. No, Miss Reinhart, you are well out of Regnum; and you and your father owe a debt of gratitude to that young Englishman for carrying you out of it."

"I call it officious and impertinent," she retorted. "If I had known what was coming I would never have left my father."

"Mr Hamilton seems to have guessed that," answered Mr Walker. "It is a great pity that he couldn't persuade your father to quit Regnum yesterday."

"How could dad suspect that the Dictator would be so low down? And I wonder how Mr Hamilton got to know as much as he did?"

"Doubtless by keeping his eyes and ears open," said the Ambassador. "In any case, I am grateful to him for having snatched at least one American from the jaws of Volsicia; and if you want to ask him to lunch or dinner, Miss Reinhart, I hope you will bring him here. I shall be proud to welcome him."

Sadie listened to him with the mingled feelings which have already been described. She was not in love with Robert Hamilton, but was by no means displeased to feel that he must be in love with her. She was modern enough to resent his interference with her liberty, but old-fashioned enough to admire him secretly for the masterful manner in which he had carried her off. On the one hand, she hated the thought that she had left her old father, however involuntarily, in the lurch. On the other hand, she had to admit to herself that her company would have done him no good in the circumstances, and that he would be relieved and delighted at her escape. Lastly, her interest in Robert Hamilton was considerably stimulated. How, she wondered, would he comport himself now that events had justified

him? She could not imagine him losing his head over it. He was not even likely to give himself airs. She hoped not, anyway!

II.

Hamilton's first step when the sensation became known in Paris was tactful enough. He called at the Embassy and left a little note for Sadie expressing his grief and sympathy. He added that he would call again next day and see her if that would be agreeable to her. Sadie was touched and comforted by what she felt to be genuine consideration for her.

In the morning she received the note which Wilbraham Bright had posted the previous evening on his way through Paris. It cheered her greatly, and predisposed her further in Hamilton's favour.

He called later in the day, and was received both by the Ambassadress and Sadie. Mrs Walker, however, soon left the two young people together. When she had gone there was a pause, though hardly an awkward one. It was broken by Hamilton.

"I hope you've forgiven me," he said, with his slow smile.

"Why?" she retorted, in similar vein.

"Because I feel how impertinent it was of me."

"I'm glad you recognise it."

"Then you do forgive me?"

"Yes, I think I do. But I haven't got over the surprise of it yet."

"Surprise?"

"Yes. You see, Mr Hamilton, I had looked on you as a quiet sort of young man who would never do anything desperate."

"There is where you made a mistake. Other people have misjudged me in the same way."

"So you are rather a desperate character?"

"I'm afraid I am. By the way, would you like a message delivered to your father?"

"How?"

"I hope to be back in Regnum to-morrow."

"Why should you go back there?"

"I feel it is the least I can do for both of you. I separated you without asking the consent of either. Your father, I hope, knows that you are safe, but I can see you are still worrying about him. Now if I can see him and bring back word how he is, that will do something to relieve your mind, won't it?"

Sadie threw him a grateful look.

"That is just too sweet of you," she exclaimed.

"I look on it as much kinder than taking me

away from Volscia. But won't you be running grave risks?"

He laughed.

"How?" he asked. "I am a British subject, and have a perfect right to enter Regnum. Volscia is not at war with Britain—yet."

"Why, do you reckon there will be war between them?"

"I shouldn't wonder, personally.

"How splendid if Britain did fight!"

"It would be an expensive business," said the Scot in serious tones. "But something's got to be done about it. And America can't do much single-handed."

Sadie recalled Wilbraham Bright's deliverance to the same effect and how angry it had made her. Now she was chastened.

"Yes, I see that," she replied. "And isn't it just too bad that a small Power like Volscia can commit an outrage against the greatest nation in the world—and get away with it?"

"That remains to be seen. Now, Miss Reinhart, if you can entrust me with a message to your father I will see that he gets it, and that you get a reply—that is, if it is humanly possible."

Why should she hang back? But she did.

"I just love it of you, offering to go back to

Regnum," she said. "But I guess I'm not going to send you into the lion's den. It isn't as if you could get father out of prison. And Mr Bright says he is as comfortable as he could expect to be as a prisoner."

"But I want to make certain of it for myself," answered Hamilton.

"No, Mr Hamilton, I can't let you go there," she said with decision. "You will be arrested as you land in the aerodrome."

"But I'm not flying this time," he persisted. "I'm going by rail, and as my passport is in order there will be no difficulty whatever on the frontier."

"Are you quite sure of that?" she asked doubtfully.

"Quite certain. I can't afford to run any risks, remember. I've got to be back in India by a certain date, and if I'm taken prisoner and unable to return I shall incur all kinds of pains and penalties—if I'm not dismissed the service."

"You're going back to India!" she exclaimed. "Do you know I had almost forgotten that you were serving there. When have you to be back?"

"Not for another seven or eight months," he assured her. "But when you consider that Napoleon imprisoned his British visitors for something like a dozen years——"

"Oh, surely dad won't have to remain so long as that in Volscia?" she cried.

"Of course not. The whole trouble will be over, I hope, in a few weeks, and in the meantime I will put you in communication with your father and him with you. If you will let me have your letter I will take my leave, as I want to catch the night train for Regnum."

So Sadie wrote her letter and gave it to him with a certain swelling of the heart. There could be no doubt now that he loved her; and she? Well, she could no longer pretend that she was indifferent to her dour admirer. She had begun to be proud of him, and although she was not wholly convinced that the task he had undertaken was free from danger, she somehow felt confident that he would carry it out successfully.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN.

I.

THE repercussions of Volscian treachery upon the rest of Europe were very different from those in America, or for that matter in Britain.

America, unfortunately, was not loved in Europe. For this there were various reasons, the chief of which was the War Debt. Every European nation except Great Britain had made its payments to America grudgingly and under protest. The deaf ear which had been turned to these protests had engendered a cumulative sense of bitterness. The result was that when Volscia kicked over the traces and struck at the liberty of several hundred Americans, the deed evoked only half-hearted expressions of disapproval.

The press comments in France, Belgium and other countries rather reminded one of the manner in which Indian newspapers are accustomed to receive the news of some violent political crime.

They profess to reprobate the incident, but they do so with their tongue in their cheek. They denounce the perpetrator in one breath, and in the next they denounce the police for having goaded him on to his deed. They blame the Government for what is generally the result of their own systematic incitement.

In the same way public opinion almost all over Europe received the astounding news from Regnum with a scarcely suppressed titter. In one or two instances the press openly expressed approval of Andreas' felon blow. When that happened the Government concerned made a point of issuing an official reprimand. For the most part, however, the official and non-official attitude of Europe was one of polite but malicious indifference.

The confederation of Europe had been inaugurated in a manner highly inauspicious to the peace of the world !

It became clear in the course of a day or two that the United States of Europe had no mind to interfere in the quarrel between the United States of America and Volscia. That is to say, it was not prepared to remonstrate with its latest recruit. Whether it would side with it in the event of a Volscio-American war remained an open question. What was quite certain was that

America could count on neither sympathy nor co-operation should she endeavour to retaliate upon Volscia by way of armed force.

There was one exception—besides the British attitude—towards the veiled hostility displayed by Europe towards America at this crisis. Germany expressed horror at what Volscia had done. The German President summoned the American Ambassador and requested him to convey to Washington his profound indignation at such an exhibition of bad faith. The Germans were undoubtedly on the side of America, partly because of the consideration she had shown them during and after the war of 1914, and partly because they were suspicious of France.

The Volscian Dictator had, in fact, arranged his *coup* in concert with the leading French financiers, who were hand in glove with the French Government. The French Government was animated by three motives in its secret encouragement of Andreas' plan.

First, it was anxious to divert attention from France's share in depriving the rest of the world of its gold. Hence the Volscian proposal to make a scapegoat of America appealed to it.

Secondly, if the Volscian demand for abrogation of the War Debt was admitted, and its Debt was written off by America, France would in-

stantly demand the cancellation of the French Debt.

Thirdly, France was by no means averse from seeing Volscia commit an act of brigandage and so alienating the general sympathy. France was afraid of Volscia, and hoped to retain the hegemony of Europe by inducing that country and its hot-headed ruler to commit an act which would reduce their moral leadership to nil.

Hence the confidence which Andreas had shown in the certainty of French backing. Hence Wilbraham Bright's deduction that France was at least as culpable as Volscia. Hence the identical conviction arrived at by Eric Wheeler on the basis of the information passed on to Hamilton by his Jewish friends.

II.

America's first reaction to Volscia's challenge was one of sheer stupefaction. That a comparatively small European State should have the impudence to offer this outrageous insult to the richest and most powerful nation in the world seemed incredible. True, the unbelievable was attested by all the newspapers and all the radio stations in the country ; but the American public

had known both to be wrong on occasion, and awaited further confirmation of the horror in incredulous silence.

The stock and commodity markets, however, failed as usual to preserve an open mind. They broke at once to an extent unknown even in 1929-1930 ; and when the general public roused itself to the grim facts it found itself in the midst of a first-class commercial as well as an absolutely unprecedented political crisis. Firms crashed ; thousands found themselves ruined by the time the country awoke to the fact that it had come perilously near to being made a laughing-stock abroad.

Then Niagara broke loose. Half a century before the nation had clamoured for war against Spain, but the agitation of 1898 was as nothing to the hurricane of fury that now swept over the land. Every means of expressing and intensifying it was resorted to—radio, the press, public meetings, debates in Congress, resolutions by State legislatures. America rose as one man and demanded that Volscia be wiped off the face of the earth.

This attitude was not quite consistent with the claim which had been made on her behalf for twenty years—namely, that the greatest American interest was peace. But consistency

is apt to be forgotten under the stress of sudden and overwhelming provocation.

When vital questions of foreign policy are discussed, the two most important factors in America are the President and the Senate. When it is a question of war, Congress as a whole comes into the picture. It sometimes happens that both Congress bodies are hostile to the President. It was so now. The Senate was especially unfriendly to the chief Executive; and although it had its own reasons for favouring war—the chief of which was the Volscian outrage on the person of Senator Westerhout—its attitude was not altogether uninfluenced by the opportunity thus afforded of putting the President in a hole.

For no one knew better than the majority in the Senate that to declare war against Volscia would be like chasing Will o' the Wisp. To begin with, it would be tantamount to declaring war against the United States of Europe. Even if the rest of Europe did not side with Volscia, as was by no means improbable owing to the general hatred of America, it would be impracticable to make war on that country without establishing bases in Europe, and it was unthinkable that any European Power would suffer such bases to be established. War therefore was ruled out as a practical proposition. Nevertheless the Senate,

after a prolonged debate, declared itself in favour of war.

The House of Representatives was also hostile to the President, but in demanding war it was influenced by less subtle motives. It merely voiced the national indignation. How the Government was going to bring to book a country three thousand miles away, in the teeth of an unfriendly or possibly an actively hostile Europe, did not trouble it in the least. If the task should prove too hard for the President, that was his funeral. All the caucuses and deputies were concerned with was to give expression to the national demand for vengeance.

Congress and nation were both crazy for war. The President was not, but against this tremendous combination only one factor was on his side. That factor was 'big business.' All the great capitalists, the oil kings, the steel kings, the coal kings and the railroad presidents were dead against war, and for a very simple reason.

By virtue of the Nineteenth Amendment, the declaration of war by the United States involved conscription of the wealth as well as the manhood of the nation. This, from the viewpoint of 'big business,' would never do. It would mean that these super-individualists, together with the colossal wealth of which they were accustomed

to dispose as seemed best to themselves, would become the servants instead of, as heretofore, the masters of the State.

Therefore the effect of the Nineteenth Amendment was to align the enormous influence of 'big business,' as the authors of the amendment intended it should, with the factors which at all times were against the employment of armed force in international affairs.

But 'big business,' great as was its power, was not omnipotent. Given even a modicum of public opinion on its side, it could use it as a fulcrum to sway national policy. But with the entire nation on its hind-legs bellowing for war, the power of wealth was apt to be discounted in the interests of peace.

III.

Such was the situation with which President Martyr and his Cabinet had to deal. The U.S.A. had been subjected to an intolerable insult. Several hundred Americans, including at least a dozen highly influential citizens had been laid ignominiously by the heels and held to ransom. The entire nation, led by the Senate and the House of Representatives, was demanding war with Volscia. To oppose this demand was to sit

on the safety valve, while to implement it was impossible !

This was the dilemma which was exercising the harassed President during an interview with the Secretary of State nearly a week after the American arrests.

President William H. Martyr was a fine-looking man, nearly sixty years of age. His iron-grey hair was abundant. His close-shaven face with its square jaw, its blunt straight nose and its firm mouth, was that of a man of action. But this impression was discounted by his eyes, which sheltered behind a pair of pince-nez and gave the face a somewhat prim and academic look. He had, in fact, been president of a university before his entry into politics. His temper was cool and he had little imagination. The outrage which had stirred his countrymen so deeply had hardly disturbed him at all. When he drafted his Message to Congress he had known what was expected of him, and had made a half-hearted attempt to live up to it. But he had done this with reluctance, knowing that redress by means of war was impossible, and doubting whether it would be worth while even if it were not.

Secretary Denver S. Willis had the air of a fashionable lawyer. He was tall and debonair, with a handsome clean-shaven face, white hair

and brilliant blue-grey eyes. It had been his unpleasant duty to announce to the President that the attitude of South America was ominous. The southern republics had been almost as glad of the rebuff to North America as the European States.

"Another complication!" murmured the President. "The Latins are apparently more solid than you thought."

"So are the Anglo-Saxons, Mr President. Great Britain has made a gesture which has saved us from being entirely isolated."

"There is something in that. But no gesture is going to help us to bring Volscia to reason. And if we can't, we shall become a laughing-stock."

"Doesn't the British gesture open up a possible solution?"

"By way of a British-American alliance? No, Mr Secretary. In the first place, Congress wouldn't look at it. In the second place, the net result would be to make us look more ridiculous than ever. The world would sit back and roar with laughter to think that in order to punish this petty brigand State it was necessary for the two greatest Powers in the world to combine their forces."

"I don't see things quite in that light, Mr

President. We are now up against a bigger thing than an insult from Volscia. We have to face the probability of a tariff war with the United States of Europe—possibly a war of another kind. As you know, Senator Westerhout was exploring these contingencies in Europe when Andreas sprung his trap on our nationals."

"Yes, and he was civilly cold-shouldered by the British Foreign Secretary."

"Because he wasn't in a position to promise delivery on our side. But the whole situation has altered since Mr Westerhout saw Lord Rotherham—altered not only from our viewpoint but from Britain's. At least that is how I read Britain's remarkable gesture in the sending of a battleship for Ambassador Kenrick."

The President pursed up his lips and reflected.

"It is a bold thought, Willis: to pluck the flower of safety from the nettle of danger, and make this insult a starting-point for a new orientation of power. But can Britain break away from the European confederacy? It would be clean against her commercial interests."

"She has broken away from it sufficiently to make this signal demonstration in our favour."

"Yes, but that commits her to nothing except disapproval of Volscia's action. And even assum-

ing that she might be willing to go further, there is Congress."

"So far as Congress is concerned, Mr President, our course is plain. Congress demands war—and so does the nation. That being so, Congress must agree to the only condition which makes war possible, and that is an alliance with the only European Power which has shown us any friendliness."

"Will Congress forego the balance of the War Debt?"

The Secretary of State was silent.

"That is the crux," continued the President. "I don't see that we can expect British co-operation so long as we are bleeding them to the tune of 300 million dollars a year. And you know as well as I do what chance there is of Congress being generous. No, Mr Secretary. I see no alternative at present except to await events, and meanwhile squeeze Volscia where she will feel it most."

There the matter rested so far as the American Government was concerned. In point of fact, the tide of American opinion was beginning to set towards the standpoint voiced by the Secretary of State rather than the more timid attitude of the President. And even while the matter was being discussed at Washington, conversations of a more practical kind were taking place in London.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN.

I.

ALMOST for the first time in his life Mr Erasmus R. Brinsmead, the American Ambassador to Britain, became conscious of the drawbacks of a too enterprising journalism. As he ascended the steps of the Foreign Office he was snapped by at least a dozen photographers, including two cinema operators, and he knew that next day's papers would contain paragraphs to the effect that "The American Ambassador called at the Foreign Office yesterday, and was received by the Marquis of Rotherham, with whom he remained in conversation for nearly an hour." And he would gladly have kept his visit to the Foreign Secretary a total secret, even from his own Government.

The business on which he was bent was not only extraordinarily confidential, but difficult beyond anything in his experience, and so delicate

that a false step might be fatal alike to himself and to Anglo-American relations.

He was admitted to Lord Rotherham's room at once, and was received with even more than the usual cordiality. The Foreign Secretary rose stiffly from his chair, but advanced a few steps to meet him. Grasping his hand warmly he looked the Ambassador full in the face and smiled. It was a friendly smile, but it signified understanding as well as sympathy. Lord Rotherham had a shrewd suspicion of the motive for the visit. The two men liked each other—a good thing at all times in view of their relative positions, but specially fortunate during a first-class crisis.

They sat down, and the Ambassador proceeded to deliver himself of the easier message which he had come to give.

"Lord Rotherham," he said, "I am instructed by the Government of the United States of America to thank you most heartily, and through you the British Government, for the handsome manner in which you came to the rescue last week, and for affording my colleague at Regnum passage to America in a British battleship. That, sir, has been hailed by the whole country as a noble gesture of sympathy, and my Government hopes it is a pledge that our two countries

will always be ready to co-operate in the interests of peace and civilisation."

The Foreign Secretary bowed stiffly.

"It is extremely good of the American Government," he said, "to signify their appreciation of what was after all an elementary act of courtesy towards the representative of a friendly nation which had been subjected to an unprecedented—or an almost unprecedented—outrage."

"But that is not all," said Mr Brinsmead. "May I add on my own behalf how gratefully I take the second and still more significant gesture which you have just made—the withdrawal of your Ambassador from Regnum and the handing of passports to the Volscian representative in London."

"Oh, as to that," was the reply, "all we have done has been to notify to Volscia our horror at its defiance not only of convention but of decency, and our determination to have no more to do with a nation which is capable of such conduct."

"It is what I would have expected of England," said the Ambassador. "As a matter of fact it is what one might have expected of other European Governments. Yet look at their attitude. Not a single repudiation of Volscia's treachery. Nay, if the silence of the Governments and the exuberance of the press may be

construed together, there is hardly a nation in Europe which doesn't approve of what Volscia has done."

"I am afraid, Ambassador, you have gauged the sentiments of Europe correctly," said the Foreign Secretary.

II.

Mr Brinsmead was somewhat taken aback. Possibly he had hoped for a slightly more diplomatic reply. It did not make his next move an easier one. Nevertheless it had to be made. He drew his chair nearer.

"Marquis," he said, "I am about to speak in a private capacity, and what I am about to say is not yet authorised by my Government. But it must be obvious to you, as it is to me, that the only way out of the present *impasse* so far as America is concerned is an Anglo-American alliance."

Lord Rotherham looked steadily at the other, and replied in his most deliberate manner—

"Speaking also as one man to another, I think you are quite right."

"I am going to put my cards down," continued Mr Brinsmead, "and take your Lordship completely into my confidence, believing that by

doing so I shall best consult those interests which I represent. The news from America makes it clear that my Government will be pushed into war with Volscia. You and I know that the only effect of that will be an ineffective and long-drawn-out struggle, neither belligerent being able to get at the other—or else that the United States of Europe will identify themselves with Volscia and begin a world war compared to which the struggle of twenty-five years ago was a skirmish."

The Foreign Secretary nodded assent.

"An Anglo-American alliance would in my view obviate both these possibilities," proceeded the Ambassador. "To begin with, Volscia, confronted with the power of the British Navy and air fleet, would probably cave in and make prompt reparation. Even should that not happen, the other European Powers would hesitate to identify themselves with Volscia. The Anglo-American alliance would then only have to deal with Volscia, whom they would have little difficulty in reducing to terms."

"The advantages of such an alliance to America are indisputable," commented the Foreign Secretary drily.

"I hope to convince you, Marquis, that the advantages to Britain are equally indisputable,"

replied Mr Brinsmead. "But the immediate point is this. Frankly, I am not authorised to open this discussion. I may never be authorised to do so. You are well aware of our national horror of all alliances, and especially of European alliances. That horror is as active as ever to-day amongst all classes. But I can't think this attitude can long continue. The American Government must soon be driven to the alternative of an alliance with the only European nation which has protested against this act of brigandage, and the only nation which has ever sought an alliance with America—the only nation also which is kindred to us in blood, language and traditions."

"The only nation, too, which has paid its debts to you without grumbling," Lord Rotherham interposed coolly.

"A just remark, sir, and I don't propose to deny it. There is not an American who does not admire the grit that Britain has shown in this and in all other matters of international adjustment. And many of the best Americans—I will go further and say all the best Americans—have long desired to put an end to the process of impoverishment to which American policy has condemned Europe. But to resume. The time is at hand when America must seek a British alliance if she is not to become the laughing-stock

of the nations. That is why I am here to-day. I have come to you in a private capacity to explore terms and possibilities beforehand, so that when I am called upon to approach you officially, I may be in a position to communicate your views to my Government at once. I am anxious, in short, to save time, which is likely to be of vital importance as the situation develops."

"An Anglo-American alliance!" mused the Foreign Secretary aloud. "That would be a marvellous result to flow from this act of treachery. If it could only be."

Lord Rotherham was patriotic, but he was also ambitious. For the moment he saw himself the most brilliantly successful statesman in Europe. What was the glory of the Premiership compared to the credit of having negotiated an alliance which would not only ensure the peace of the world, but would consolidate the forces of Anglo-Saxon civilisation?

III.

The Ambassador, a shrewd man also in his way, may or may not have guessed at what was passing in Lord Rotherham's mind. At all events he waited.

"Now, Ambassador, let's get down to hard facts," said the Foreign Secretary, emerging from his reverie. "You see, this is the second time the same proposition has been put to me within the past few weeks."

"You refer to the mission of Senator Westerhout?"

"Precisely. Senator Westerhout voiced sentiments very similar to your own, and was clearly of opinion that an Anglo-American alliance was a desirable thing. He also claimed that he spoke on behalf of a large number of senators, but jibbed when I asked him point-blank if the men of his way of thinking were in the majority. I imagine that at that time they certainly were not. Now, Ambassador, what is the position to-day? Is there a reasonable likelihood that any treaty of the kind would be ratified by the Senate, assuming that your Government proposed it?"

"I am convinced, Marquis, that it would, for this reason. The Senate is backing the almost universal demand for war. The President is the agent of the nation for the prosecution of the war. He is therefore entitled to demand in his turn that war shall be conducted under the only conditions which can lead to victory. Further, you may take it from me that since Senator

Westerhout's arrest the number of senators in favour of a British alliance has at least doubled."

" So far so good. It would be of little use discussing the matter and committing the Empire to a policy of this kind if there was an even chance that the treaty would be repudiated. Now for details. The alliance to be a full-blooded offensive and defensive pact, with a mutual obligation resting on either party to come to the rescue of the other when attacked ? "

" Yes, Marquis, that is of the essence of my scheme. With regard to the present crisis, the allies to hand a joint ultimatum to Volscia, requiring a form of reparation to be mutually agreed upon. In the event of a refusal a joint declaration of war to be prosecuted by air, land and sea until satisfaction has been obtained."

" As to the sinews of war—America to advance Great Britain whatever sums were necessary to enable her to carry on ? "

There was a twinkle in Lord Rotherham's eye as he spoke. The Ambassador smiled a little uneasily as he took the point.

" Why, certainly, Marquis. The advances to be offset against the unpaid balance of the British Debt."

" Very generous of you, I'm sure. If it ever comes off it will enable America to sympathise

with the position of Great Britain as the treasurer of the Allies in 1914-18. And now, as to division of the spoils? We to pay ourselves in territory, and you to receive a money indemnity?"

"If there are to be annexations these would obviously be the British portion. America is bound hand and foot by the Monroe Doctrine."

The Foreign Secretary laughed outright.

"My dear Ambassador," he exclaimed, "the Monroe Doctrine is the most elastic obligation which your great country ever imposed upon itself. It didn't prevent you from annexing the Philippines, or your President from inaugurating the League of Nations of unblessed memory. No, I think we must share and share alike. By the way, Ambassador, now that we are discussing questions of *quid pro quo*—why the devil should Great Britain ally herself with America at all?"

IV.

The Ambassador winced as if he had been struck. Then he frowned, and his handsome face grew red. Had the Britisher merely led him on? Before he could reply, however, Lord Rotherham proceeded—

"We must look at the question from both

sides. You have very frankly pointed out the advantages — indeed the vital necessity — to America at the present time of allying herself with Great Britain. Now let us consider the numerous disadvantages which such a compact would impose upon us."

"I am not unmindful of them, Marquis."

"I daresay not, but to clear the air I will consider them in order. First and foremost comes the fact that by joining America we may be incurring the hostility of Europe just at a time when Europe has become a federation. We shall be regarded not as a European Power but as a purely oceanic commonwealth which has become a vassal of America. We shall become an American outpost, taking all the strain of Europe-America friction, while America, three thousand miles away, will enjoy such security as an Anglo-American alliance can give her without incurring any of its risks."

"Lord Rotherham!" protested Mr Brinsmead, "you may or may not intend to convey that America will go back on her bargain in times of stress, but let me remind you that America embodied ten million men for the war in Europe, and would have sent the lot across the Atlantic if they had been required."

"And if there had been enough British ships

to carry them," rejoined the Minister. " Well, Ambassador, let us proceed to the next point—not, however, without an acknowledgment that America did what she undertook to do, and a good deal more, in the last great war."

" I thank you, Marquis," said the Ambassador.

" Next," Lord Rotherham pointed out, " we should to a certainty be excluded from the Free Trade area of the United States of Europe. That, considering the uphill struggle we have had for so many years, against tariff barriers in Europe as well as America, would be a fatal handicap."

" As to that," answered the Ambassador, " I can hardly conceive of an alliance between the two nations which would not provide for mutual freedom of trade."

" Neither can I," retorted the Minister. " In fact, unless that were specifically provided for, no alliance would be possible."

" Now for the advantages of the alliance," said Mr Brinsmead. " In the first place it would probably avert war."

" I agree."

" Next, it would unite a fifth of the world's population and the whole of the English-speaking races."

" I wonder if you are right there, Ambassador. We thought our alliance with France twenty

years ago would bring the two peoples together. Instead of that the estrangement is greater than ever. In fact, I wonder whether our very kinship wouldn't make for friction. We can stand more from complete strangers than we can from each other."

"Well, we speak the same language, which eliminates a powerful source of misunderstanding."

The Minister's eyebrows went up.

"But do we?" he quizzed.

"Yes," countered the Ambassador with a smile. "The English are taking to American like ducks to water."

"Like geese, rather. But I'm afraid you're right. Anyhow, Ambassador, Free Trade between the U.S.A. and the British Empire would be well worth running risks for."

"I take it, Marquis, that in the event of an alliance we should be at liberty to utilise the Irish harbours as American bases if it were necessary to prosecute the war against Volscia?"

"I don't see why you shouldn't. But wait a moment, Ambassador. Just as you can't bind your Government, so I am not in a position to bind mine. Speaking as man to man I am first and last for an alliance between our two peoples. Should I be fortunate enough to negotiate the treaty of alliance I shall have achieved my highest

ambition. But I must warn you that the Government is not unanimous on the point, and the same applies even more to the public and to Parliament. There is one condition which public opinion will most certainly insist on before it will sanction any move towards America."

"And that is——?"

"The return of a substantial portion of the gold which she has drained from Europe."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN.

I.

SINCE leaving England Robert Hamilton had kept in touch with Eric Wheeler in accordance with their agreement. Before setting out for Regnum he had written to him giving an account of his recent adventures, describing the situation in Volscia as he had been able to observe it during his brief visit. He also informed him that he was about to re-enter the lion's den in order to try and bring Sadie news of her father. Although he had made light of the risks of his second venture to Sadie, he himself was fully aware of them. So, he felt pretty sure, was the Foreign Under-Secretary.

He caught an early train from the Gare de Lyons. In the ordinary course he would have reached Regnum in the very early hours of the following morning. He was not surprised to discover that the service both to and from Volscia

was disorganised, and that his train was running very late. It was evident that there was still more congestion on the down line. Every train he met was packed with tourists leaving Regnum —fleeing from Volscia as though it were a plague spot. They were of all nationalities, but most of them were British and German.

“Volscia has already lost hundreds of thousands of pounds by her treachery,” he reflected. “I wonder how much more she is going to lose, and how long she will take to regain the confidence of the nations.”

In the meantime he had the train largely to himself. At the frontier the Customs were so busy attending to outgoing tourists that his luggage was passed without even a question.

He reached Regnum shortly before noon next day. The Central Station was tremendously busy with departing traffic. As one of the very few new arrivals he found himself regarded with curiosity by the railway officials. There was considerable excitement in the streets. Special editions of the newspapers were selling rapidly, and from the cries of the newsboys and remarks which he overheard he gathered, with a start, that Britain’s position was being canvassed. His knowledge of Volscian was just sufficient to make him suspect that popular opinion was far from

friendly. It was also sufficient to bring home to him afresh the quixotic nature of his own errand.

Other signs of popular excitement were the flags flying from various buildings, portraits of the Dictator in every shop window, and the applause which greeted the numerous military units as they marched along the streets.

The Hotel Imperiale was comparatively deserted when Hamilton drove up to it. Clearly the restaurateurs were among the first victims on the altar of Volscian patriotism. Here, as at the station, the Scot seemed to be an object of interest and curiosity of a not too friendly nature. People evidently thought it strange that a Britisher should choose this time to come to Regnum, when most of his countrymen were headed in the opposite direction.

He asked the hall porter about the latest news. The man seemed reluctant to tell, but on being pressed replied, with a certain sullen emphasis—

“The English have conveyed the American Ambassador from Viennaso in one of their battleships.”

Hamilton whistled. No wonder British stock had gone down in Regnum! His visit began to appear worse timed than ever. Nevertheless his

heart leaped at the gesture. Britain had once more stood for honour and decency in international affairs.

He changed, lunched, and then drove to the British Embassy. Here, too, there were signs of bustle, and his eye, sharpened by Secretariat experience in India, told him that a flitting was in prospect. He sent in his card to Sir Wilfred Renshaw, and the magic words 'Indian Civil Service' upon it procured him (as he flattered himself) immediate audience.

The British Ambassador, young-looking for his post, tall and well groomed, received him with cool politeness. Hamilton told him exactly why he had come to Regnum, and what he proposed to do there. Sir Wilfred smiled at the story of the flight to Paris, which he had already heard at second hand, but stared amazedly when Hamilton explained that he had come back to see Mr Reinhart.

"My dear sir," he exclaimed, "why couldn't you leave well alone? Mr Reinhart, I imagine—and in fact I am sure—is all right, for I have been to the concentration camp, and the prisoners are being well treated. But you may find it more difficult to get away now than you did four days ago."

Hamilton shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm not surprised to hear that from what I have observed," he said, "but it looked a simple enough trip two days ago in Paris. However, now that I am here, I feel I must redeem my promise to Miss Reinhart, if it is humanly possible."

Sir Wilfred Renshaw shook his head.

"I don't think it is," he replied.

"I was wondering," said Hamilton, "whether you could give me an introduction to the Dictator?"

"The Dictator!" repeated the startled Ambassador. "Good heavens, no. He would eat you alive—that is if he saw you, which, of course, he wouldn't."

"Still," persisted the Scot, "I would like to see him."

"But surely you know the position? We have given Andreas the most deadly offence by sending a battleship for the American Ambassador, and I have every reason to believe that the British-Volscian situation will be still worse in another twenty-four hours' time."

"I know, sir," Hamilton interrupted. "The Embassy is leaving."

"Why do you imagine that?"

"I was in the Secretariat in India. The signs are unmistakable."

Sir Wilfred smiled under his moustache.

" You are at liberty to draw your own conclusions from your own observations," he said. " But in any case you must see that it is useless to think of interviewing the Dictator. I should strongly advise you to clear out of Volscia with as little fuss as you can."

The Ambassador was adamant. It was his duty, he said, to preserve his countrymen from danger, not to send them into it.

" Take my advice," were his parting words, " and leave Regnum by the first train. If you have difficulty in getting away, let me know, and I will give you all the help I can. But you are not going to Andreas from the British Embassy."

That, however, is exactly what Hamilton did.

II.

On leaving the Embassy he drove straight to the Palazzo. There he found it even more difficult to obtain an entrance than had Wilbraham Bright a few days before. By dint of steadily repeating the formula, " I have come direct from the British Embassy and have an important message for the Dictator," he managed to get as far as the ante-room after having been thor-

oughly searched for arms. Once there his task seemed easy. The Secretary was intensely nervous as to the possibilities of British intervention. So was Martin Andreas, now that these were steadily hardening in the direction of practical politics. After a brief consultation the visitor was admitted to the Dictator's room.

He could hardly have caught Martin Andreas in a less amiable mood. He was furious at the British gesture of friendliness towards America. He was even more furious at the first act of retaliation from America. It was simple but effective—only an embargo upon all remittances from America to Volscia—but it was going to hit Volscia very hard, as the Dictator well knew.

There were millions of Volscian immigrants in America, and they remitted many millions of dollars every year to their friends and relatives in Volscia. These remittances almost counter-weighed the yearly payments by Volscia in respect of the war debt, and they helped thousands of poor Volscian families to keep their heads above water. That source of supply was now completely cut off. Strange as it may seem, the Dictator had not thought of it when he planned his onslaught on the national creditor.

His heavy jowl had never looked more forbidding as, without a word, he motioned Hamilton

to a seat. Unemotional as he was, the Scot experienced a slight thrill to find himself so close to the most formidable personality in Europe—especially when he thought of the proposition he was about to lay before him.

“ You have come with a message from the British Ambassador ? ” he said. He spoke in English, with a gruff Levantine intonation.

Hamilton took a hold on himself.

“ Not exactly, Your Excellency,” he replied. “ I have come directly from the British Embassy, but my message has nothing to do with the Ambassador.”

Andreas' frown deepened.

“ Why, then, do you come ? ” he asked.

“ My purpose,” said Hamilton, “ is to press Your Excellency for permission to visit Mr J. G. Reinhart in the American concentration camp.”

“ Why do you wish to visit him ? ”

“ Because, Your Excellency, I removed his daughter to Paris against her will four days ago, and she is anxious for news of her father.”

The perfect coolness with which these words were spoken had the effect of checking the fierce outburst which would otherwise have taken place. The veins stood out on the Dictator's forehead as he glared at him. Presently he said thickly—

“ You are the Englishman who carried off the

American young lady by air on the last day of June?"

Hamilton bowed.

"Your Excellency is correct," he replied, "except that I am not an Englishman. I am Scottish."

"And you have the boldness to come back for her father. Have you another aeroplane ready?"

"Not in the least, Your Excellency. My object is solely to see Mr Reinhart, to deliver to him a letter from his daughter and to take back to Paris a message from him."

"Have you the letter with you?"

"Yes, Your Excellency."

"Let me see it."

"How can I?"

"I did not expect you to show it. But I mean to see it."

The Dictator's jaw came out as he pressed an electric bell.

The Secretary came rushing in, followed by two soldiers with fixed bayonets. The Scot was immediately seized by the arms and yanked out of his chair. He offered no resistance, standing perfectly still with his arms held behind his back and a bayonet tickling his throat.

"Search him, Alessandro," growled the Dictator to his Secretary in Volscian.

The missing letter was found in his pocket, and Andreas broke the cover without hesitation. He read it through, and then handed it to the Secretary. After a brief colloquy in Volscian Andreas turned to Hamilton and spoke in English.

"There appears to be nothing suspicious in this letter or in your other papers," he said. "The circumstances are unusual, but you are at liberty in the meantime to see your friend in the concentration camp. You will, of course, proceed under escort."

He made another sign, and Hamilton, still strictly guarded, left the presence and waited in the ante-room until the Secretary once more appeared. Requesting him to sit down, he said—

"His Excellency regrets his apparent harshness. In effect he is compelled to much strictness and suspicion. So you are the Englishman who flew to Paris with the American signorina? It is a great pity you came back."

After which cryptic remark he gave an order, and the two soldiers marched out. Presently a smart young officer came in, saluted, and invited Hamilton, in good English, to follow him. They passed through the usual procession of rooms, along corridors and downstairs until they reached a side entrance, from which it was only

a short distance to the roadway. Here they got into a taxi, and the lieutenant gave an order to the driver. Then he turned to Hamilton.

"I am taking you to the American camp," he said. "You are the first foreigner who has been permitted to visit it."

III.

To reach the concentration camp they had to drive nearly a dozen miles. It lay in a plain beyond the hills immediately surrounding Regnum. The site had once been a marsh, which had long since been drained. Its chief drawback appeared to be the heat, which was fierce at that time of the year.

The camp was laid out in rectangular rows of service tents, each of which accommodated two people. It was now about six in the evening, and the prisoners were seated outside their tents, or walking up and down, enjoying the comparative coolness. Deck tennis and badminton courts had been improvised, and these occupied the younger prisoners.

Mr Reinhart was eventually discovered looking on at one of these games. He turned as Hamilton spoke to him. He looked older, and the expres-

sion of his handsome face had changed. It was gloomy and almost fierce. At first it registered sheer amazement as he recognised Hamilton. Then there was a look of alarm.

"Hamilton!" he exclaimed, wringing his hand. "What has happened? Have you been arrested? Where is Sadie?"

"Sadie is safe in Paris," answered Hamilton, "and I haven't been arrested—yet. I've come here with a message for you."

Several onlookers had turned round to scrutinise the new-comer, and Reinhart now led him away from the crowd. The Volscian officer remained within earshot.

Hamilton briefly described the flight to Paris. When he spoke of Sadie as safe at the Embassy, Mr Reinhart grasped his hand.

"Mr Hamilton," he said, "I am more grateful to you than I have ever been to any man in my life. Yes, sir; and if I ever get out of this cursed place I'll make every word of it good—especially when I remember that if I'd listened to you I need never have come here."

Then he looked fiercely round at the Volscian officer.

"But say, Mr Hamilton," he said in louder tones, "don't you agree that on general grounds I was justified in refusing to believe that a so-

called civilised Government was capable of such an outrage? Wouldn't it have been a reflection on Volscia if I had accepted your timely offer?"

"I certainly agree with that," answered Hamilton. "That's why I recognised the hopelessness of arguing the point."

"But now," Mr Reinhart went on, raising his voice again, "let me get out of this place and I'll never set foot in this cursed country again. Nor will any other American."

"I hope, Mr Reinhart, that you won't be here very long."

"I'm ready to stay here all my life, sir, rather than that my country should stoop to paying tribute to brigands to get me out. And so says every American in this camp. I daresay that by putting our hands in our pockets we ourselves could turn up a substantial part of the indemnity demanded, but we won't, Mr Hamilton—not if we stay here for ever. I want you to tell that to the world when you go back to Paris."

"You mean, *if* I go back to Paris," replied Hamilton, looking round in his turn. "I am by no means so confident of getting back as I was when I started out."

Then he told him of the British battleship conveying the American Ambassador from Vien-naso.

Mr Reinhart wrung his hand again.

"That news makes everything worth while," he cried. "It is what I have longed and prayed for—Britain and America real comrades in arms. If they join forces, the war is over before it is begun."

"I should have had a letter to give you," said Hamilton; and described how it had been taken from him.

Mr Reinhart, whose face had cleared from the moment he had heard of the British gesture towards America, received the news philosophically.

"The man who could seize us with treachery could do anything," he remarked. "Well, Mr Hamilton, I won't expose you to a repetition of the experience. Just give little Sadie a kiss from her father——"

"I will, sir, with pleasure; but I doubt if she'll take it from me."

"Then tell her I'm comfortable, if not exactly happy, and so are Senator and Mrs Westerhout. We want to get away from this infernal place as quick as possible, but not a finger is to be raised by way of indemnity if we stay here for ever. Don't forget that. There's just one thing we want, Mr Hamilton, and that is books. I

was hustled out of the hotel in such a hurry that I left all mine behind."

"I have thought of that," said Hamilton eagerly. "I've brought a bagful, and they are now at my hotel. I'll send or bring them down to you."

"That's fine, my boy. You can now tell Sadie that there's nothing more I want, except a sight of her sweet face, and I'll go without that for long before I'd see her here. I reckon that young officer is getting impatient, Hamilton. So good-bye to you, and once more a thousand thanks for all you've done."

They shook hands warmly.

"Good-bye, Mr Reinhart—or rather *au revoir*; and may we see each other again soon."

Hamilton turned away, accompanied by the Volscian officer. The two walked together in silence until they reached the entrance to the camp. There they found an officer awaiting them, who was obviously the Commandant of the camp. The second officer saluted, and Hamilton raised his hat. Then, as he was about to pass through, the Commandant stopped him and said—

"I am afraid, Signor, you cannot leave the camp. My instructions are that you remain here awaiting further orders from the Dictator."

Although he was more or less prepared for this, the coolness with which the loss of his liberty was announced to him was too much for his self-control.

"What does this mean?" he exclaimed. "Hasn't your Dictator enough on his hands? Is he prepared for war with England as well as America?"

The soldier shrugged his shoulders.

"I have my orders," he replied. "I cannot discuss them. You will occupy one of these tents for to-night (pointing to one or two small tents near-by). To-morrow you can move in amongst the Americans if you choose."

"I demand to see the Dictator."

"That demand cannot be granted."

"Then I protest to you, as his representative, that this second and most intolerable outrage will certainly not be endured by my country. Your Dictator is a madman, who will bring utter ruin upon his people."

"Be silent!" commanded the other. "No one may abuse the Dictator in the presence of a Volscian soldier. If you will keep quiet you will receive the same treatment as the Americans. But if you insult the Dictator your treatment will be very different. Your baggage will be brought

to you within the hour. I have the honour to wish you good night."

Both officers saluted and turned away.

There was nothing for it but to submit. Hamilton walked towards the poor-looking tent which had been allotted to him. Entering, he sat down gloomily to ponder his new position.

It was more or less what might have been expected, but it was damned unpleasant all the same. What about Sadie? What about the rest of his leave? And, what was more important, what about getting back to India in time?

"I shall be seeing old Reinhart again much sooner than I expected," he said to himself with a rueful smile.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN.

I.

WHEN Robert Hamilton planned his quixotic visit to Regnum the last thing he expected or desired was that it would become a second 'Jenkins's Ear.' But that was exactly what it did become. Forty-eight hours after his arrest he had become the most talked of person in Europe. Not that he knew anything about it at the time. As a prisoner in the American camp he was rigorously debarred from access to all newspapers. But when he did emerge from captivity he awoke, like Byron, to find himself famous ; and the authorities in India had begun to wonder how they were going to keep such a celebrity amenable to the ordinary restraints of service conditions.

It might not have happened if he had not written to Eric Wheeler just before leaving Paris. But that letter put the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs on the alert. Unsentimental as

he was, he was moved by the story of the flight from Regnum.

"So that's how the land lies," he thought. "Well, little Sadie might have done much worse—and so might Hamilton."

When he read that Hamilton was about to return to Regnum he swore under his breath.

"The last man I should have cast for Don Quixote!" he exclaimed. "I thought Scotsmen always looked before they leaped. This is going to lead to complications."

His next step was to wireless in code to Sir Wilfred Renshaw, asking if Hamilton had been to see him. In his letter the Scot had mentioned his intention of enlisting the good offices of the Embassy. The message reached the Ambassador only a few minutes after Hamilton had left him.

Sir Wilfred wirelessed in reply that Hamilton had called, and had been strongly advised to leave Regnum at once.

The Foreign Office next required to know what had happened to him. No reply was received for some six hours; at the end of that time it transpired that he had found his way to the camp of the interned Americans, and had been detained there.

This news was received in London some three hours after Hamilton's arrest. Meanwhile Eric

Wheeler, fearing the worst, had held a consultation with his chief, Lord Rotherham. The Foreign Minister, after considering his course of action, and on confirmation of Hamilton's arrest, called a meeting of the emergency committee of the Cabinet. The emergency committee, or inner ring of the Cabinet, consisted of the Prime Minister, the Lord Chancellor, the Foreign Secretary, the Ministers for War and Air and the First Lord of the Admiralty.

At this meeting a decision of the utmost importance was taken. It has been mentioned that the British Ambassador at Regnum had been instructed to demand his passports six days after the wholesale arrests of Americans. This instruction would have taken effect the following day. The emergency committee cancelled the order, and substituted for it an ultimatum which was to be handed to the Volscian Dictator at once.

The ultimatum demanded the release of Robert Hamilton within twenty-four hours. Failing immediate compliance the Ambassador was to apply for his passports, a measure which was tantamount to a declaration of war.

The ultimatum was presented at ten o'clock the next morning, and the news was all over the world by mid-day. This was followed by a universal panic. The scenes of a week before

were nothing to it. Every stock exchange was closed; every Government in Europe proclaimed a moratorium. Every country in Europe, especially those bordering on Volscia, prepared for emergencies. Three countries, including Volscia, mobilised their armies and called up their reserves.

The same afternoon the ultimatum was debated in both Houses of Parliament. The Government, taking Parliament and the country fully into its confidence, announced that it had taken the only step possible to it in view of Volscia's second and most insolent challenge to civilisation. Identical statements were made by the Foreign Secretary in the House of Lords and the Under-Secretary in the House of Commons.

The Opposition leader offered half-hearted criticism of the ultimatum. He knew very well that public opinion was with the Government, but was bound by his position to oppose it. His attack brought up the Prime Minister, Sir Marcus Maxwell, with a speech which was both diplomatic and undiplomatic—as the sequel showed.

"The right hon. gentleman," he said, "has asked why His Majesty's Government could not have negotiated with the Volscian Government instead of proceeding at once to the extreme course of presenting an ultimatum. I will tell him. His Majesty's Government have felt for

some time that Volscia under its present rulers (an hon. member, "Ruler")—under its present ruler—has set itself to defy all the conventions which have hitherto subsisted between one State and another. Its orbit has been, to put it very mildly, eccentric, and it has steadily grown more and more of a danger to the peace of Europe. The climax of its anti-social tendencies came last week, when several hundred American citizens were, without warning, arrested and held in captivity, while, to crown this atrocious act of treachery, a heavy ransom was demanded of America as a condition of their release.

"His Majesty's Government immediately protested, both in London and in Regnum, against this unparalleled—or almost unparalleled—outrage. We further defined our attitude in the matter by proffering a British battleship for the conveyance of the American Ambassador from Volscia to New York. At the same time we instructed the British Ambassador at Regnum to demand his passports after six days. Our reason for delaying this step even for a week was to give our own nationals every opportunity to get away from Volscia before a formal rupture of diplomatic relations.

"But see what has now happened. With another insolent gesture of contempt for inter-

national comity and ordinary decency, the Volscian Government has seized and interned a British subject—a distinguished officer of His Majesty's Indian Civil Service, whose only offence was that he had snatched an American lady out of the clutches of a brigand State the day before her father was arrested. There can be no question that but for Mr Hamilton's kindly action this lady would have had to share her father's imprisonment.

"Whether it was wise of Mr Hamilton to venture back into Regnum after he had baulked these international brigands of their prey is, of course, open to question. But it is within the knowledge of the Government that the object of his second visit was an entirely honourable and chivalrous one. It was to convey a message from the lady he had rescued to her father, who was an inmate of the internment camp. What excuse the Volscian Government has to put forward for the arrest of Mr Hamilton in these circumstances I do not know. I have not asked. (Loud cheers.) The arrest of a British subject at the whim of a tyrant is the climax of a long series of outrages which cannot be permitted to continue. (Renewed cheers.) His Majesty's Government have therefore taken the shortest and possibly the sharpest method of bringing the Volscian Govern-

ment to its senses, by requiring it to deliver up Mr Hamilton, alive and well, within twenty-four hours. If there is any failure to comply with this requisition, His Majesty's Government will withdraw their representative from the Volscian capital, and simultaneously with the breaking off of diplomatic relations will take such measures by air, land or sea—or in all three ways (loud cheers)—as will serve to convince the Volscian Dictator that he cannot ride rough-shod over all the conventions which have for centuries governed the relations between the peoples of Europe."

The Prime Minister was greeted with deafening cheers as he sat down. The Opposition did not venture on a vote of no confidence. The feeling in the House was overwhelmingly on the side of the Government. Public opinion had also been roused by an act which came at the end of a series of humiliating anti-British demonstrations which had not been confined to Volscia. There appeared to be a general impression that Great Britain could be insulted with impunity. The time had now come, in the view of the Government and the people alike, when this kind of thing must cease.

The country was still staggering under a crushing debt, unemployment was rife, the dole had disappeared, and grumbling against the Govern-

ment had been more than usually bitter. But the spectacle of Volscia running amok, the outrage upon a Britisher following upon an even more outrageous attack on America, had forced a closure of the ranks. The country was ready to vote a thousand millions if necessary ; and Sir Marcus Maxwell gave it fair warning that he might soon call upon it to do so.

The attempt of the Opposition to challenge the ultimatum was equally futile in the House of Lords ; and the general effect of the debate was to convince Europe that Great Britain would stand no nonsense.

The markets were closed. Nevertheless Volscian stocks fell heavily when the British Prime Minister's speech was broadcast to Europe.

II.

On the same day on which her admirer's arrest was being debated in Parliament, Sadie received a letter from Joan Wheeler dated from Cadogan Place. It read :—

“ DARLING SADIE,—What a romance ! And what an example you daughters of the Republic are perpetually setting to us poor representatives

of a decayed aristocracy! My dear, I want to congratulate you, and I'm so furiously jealous I can hardly speak to you! Do you realise that that flight to Paris and its sequel are almost certain to lead to a war between Britain and Volscia? In my extreme youth I remember reading a very old novel with a striking title—'Like Another Helen.' That's you, dear, to the life. Wasn't Helen carried off by (not to) Paris, and wasn't the result the Trojan War, which lasted ten years? Funny, that quiet little Scotch Civilian having the nerve to snatch you from the jaws of Andreas, and then venturing back into the lion's den to take a message to your father! You must have inspired him with the real old-fashioned sentiment. I will postpone my congratulations till we meet.

"And that reminds me; I am writing to ask—or rather to demand—that you come to London at once and stay here with us until your father is released. (Eric is confident that neither he nor the other Americans will be long in captivity.) You are much too attractive to remain in Paris as an unattached spinster. Your right place is with your old friends, and under the protection of an elderly female like myself. In addition to which, I am anxious to bask in the reflected sunlight of your glory. For make no mistake, Sadie,

you have achieved celebrity at a bound. You have become a world topic, and—another reason for hurrying to London as fast as you can—here is your best chance of obtaining a certain measure of obscurity. Otherwise you will be worried to death by reporters, photographers, and society paragraphists. Send me a wireless on receipt of this, and follow your sweet self by the first boat or plane. Your ever loving

“ JOAN.”

Sadie had, in fact, been wondering where she should go. The Ambassador and Mrs Walker were kindness itself, but obviously she must move on sooner or later; and to receive a pressing invitation from her dearest friend was at the moment little less than a godsend.

She showed the letter to her host and hostess. The Ambassador's comment was somewhat unexpected.

“ I am the last person to hurry you away, my dear,” he said, “ but I don't think it would be a bad thing for you to get out of France.”

Sadie raised her eyebrows.

“ Surely the French are not going to copy the Volscians ? ” she asked.

“ Oh, no—although you must remember that it was the French who began it a century and a

half ago. But the fact is, the French attitude, to Americans and to British alike, is not specially friendly at the moment."

"It hasn't been friendly to us for a long time, has it?"

"That is true. All the same, Miss Reinhart, I think London is a better place for you than Paris until this trouble is over."

The same day Wilbraham Bright called at the Embassy. He had finished the urgent business which had taken him to London, and had hastened back to Paris to redeem his promise to Sadie. He handed her the jewel-case and her father's order on the London agents.

Hearing that she was leaving for London next day he offered himself as escort.

"Although," he added, "I am probably letting myself in for a pretty big thing. You know, of course, that you are the most talked of young woman in England; and to-morrow or the day after you will be the most talked of young woman in the world."

"What an infernal nuisance!" Sadie exclaimed.

"My dear young lady, you are crying out before you are hurt. When you have beaten off a hundred interviewers and run the gauntlet of all the cinema operators and camera-men in England you can begin to talk. But don't be

afraid. I'll stand up for you, and as I have some little influence with the press, I shall be able to save you at least a part of the inconvenience. But what on earth made a level-headed Scotchman like your friend Hamilton rush back to Regnum ? ”

Sadie, who had never ceased to blame herself for allowing him to go, was promptly up in arms.

“ I think it was very kind and generous of him,” she replied. “ I didn't want him to go, but he saw that I was worried about father, and he insisted. If I had dreamed that the Dictator would lay hands on a Britisher, I should have refused to let him go.”

“ I doubt whether you could have prevented him,” Bright answered. “ He struck me as one of those dour fellows who don't often play the fool, but when they do take it into their heads nothing will stop 'em. The last person I should have imagined as the hero of an international romance, or the cause of the biggest crisis for Britain since 1914.”

“ Do you think he and my father will be kept prisoners for long ? ” asked Sadie.

“ I should hope not. It all depends on whether Volscia will fight. Personally I don't think even Andreas will venture to take on both Britain and America. But I'm coming to the conclusion that

Andreas is capable of anything ; and then there is always the possibility that the United States of Europe may interfere. France is certainly backing Volscia under the rose."

III.

They flew to Croydon next day—a plan which had the disadvantage of giving away the names of passengers. The result was that immediately on landing Sadie was surrounded by an army of newspaper men and women, with notebooks, cameras and cinemas, the last-named whirring spasmodically all round the two travellers while they underwent the ordeal of cross-examination.

If Sadie had been an English girl she would have been inclined to cling to Wilbraham Bright for protection, especially as he had promised to help her through the business. As an American she had much less objection to the process—to begin with, at all events. As the cross-fire developed, however, she became distinctly angry.

The crowd of journalists closed in upon her the moment her foot touched the ground. There were two women among them, and when half a dozen people accosted her at once she turned instinctively to them. She afterwards wished she had not.

"Miss Reinhart," said one of them, a short perky little creature, very much 'all there,' but not as well dressed as the average shop-girl, "I represent the 'Daily Whirl.' How did you enjoy your flight from Regnum?"

"It was just like any other flight," Sadie replied.

The note-takers within earshot jotted down that she spoke without an American accent.

"Why did you leave your father behind?" was the next question.

Sadie gasped, and her blue eyes shot fire at her assailant. She now turned to one of the men, who instantly seized the opening.

"Do you think America will fight or pay?" he asked.

"She certainly won't pay," answered Sadie.

"But she expects other people to pay?" This from a representative of the 'Hustler.'

Her first tormentor returned to the attack.

"How long have you known Mr Hamilton?" she asked.

"I met him some months ago on the voyage from India," Sadie replied, raging inwardly.

"Is he good-looking?"

In desperation she turned at last to Wilbraham Bright, who stood just behind her, and had been exchanging news with the 'Times' man as far

as the clicking of cameras, the buzz that went on round Sadie and the whirr of the cinemas would permit him. He responded to her appeal at once.

"Miss Reinhart," he said, uplifting his pleasant voice, "is bewildered by her recent experiences, and would rather not talk at present. She has, however, given me an account of her adventures." And he proceeded to recapitulate the essence of what Sadie had told him, weaving it into a story to which she herself listened fascinated. For the first time she saw the trip objectively, and as an essay in romance. The shorthand writers were now so busy taking down Bright's story that they paid no more attention to her. The cameras, however, clicked steadily and the whirr of the cinema apparatus went on intermittently. She felt infinitely grateful to Wilbraham Bright for his intervention. She would certainly have been driven distracted or seen red if she had had to stand up to all these questions herself.

At last the curiosity of the press was satisfied, and the two were at liberty to move. Sadie's special friend of the 'Whirl,' however, had a last shot in her locker.

"Miss Reinhart," she insinuated, taking hold of her arm as she moved away, "have you got a photograph of Mr Hamilton?"

"No, I haven't," was the fierce reply, "and if I had, I certainly wouldn't give it to you."

The lady had her revenge next day, when the 'Whirl' headed a highly fanciful interview with—

"AMERICAN GIRL DENIES ENGAGEMENT TO
FLIGHT COMPANION."

IV.

Sadie and Robert Hamilton had, in fact, become the central figures not only of an international romance, but of a world crisis. Public feeling in America had been wrought up to a high pitch over the Volscian outrage. Vengeance and war had been denounced on the aggressor, but it was beginning to dawn on the public mind that Volscia was immune from attack by America. At this point Britain's entry into the quarrel, following upon her cousinly gesture when the American Ambassador sailed from Viennaso, had moved it to a fever of enthusiasm. A wave of emotion swept the country from end to end. England and the English became the rage. The ancient links of sentiment and consanguinity were burnished afresh until they shone in the sunlight.

The enthusiasm reached its height when the British battleship 'Thunderer,' with Ambassador Kenrick on board, put into New York harbour; its personnel were nearly smothered by the effusiveness of their reception. Never since the War of Independence had the two nations come so close together.

On the crest of this wave of enthusiasm floated the buoyant figures of Sadie Reinhart and Robert Hamilton, much to Sadie's amusement and annoyance, for Hamilton, of course, knew nothing about it. The young Englishman (the fact that he was a Scot did not worry the American newspapers) who had outwitted the tyrant of Volscia and had carried off the beautiful American in the teeth of his cunning preparations was the hero of the moment. The story of his exploit passed from paper to paper and from mouth to mouth. His portrait and Sadie's appeared in every daily and weekly paper in Britain and America. It was assumed (and announced) that they had been engaged ever since the fateful voyage from India which had first made them acquainted with each other. John G. Reinhart's fortune was canvassed all over America, and was variously estimated at anything from ten to twenty millions. Embroidering on this text the more sensational English papers came out with headlines such as "A

Lucky Flight: Indian Civilian to wed Great Heiress."

"My dear," said Joan Wheeler to Sadie, shortly after her arrival in London, "you've simply got to marry Robert Hamilton. Otherwise your countrymen will never forgive you, and I doubt whether mine will either."

Sadie smiled.

"Don't add to my worries," she replied. "You can't imagine how trying it is to be a world celebrity."

The 'Daily Whirl' at first denied the engagement, but afterwards asserted it; and as no one cared two hoots what it said one way or the other, people simply adopted the version which they individually preferred. Which was, of course, that an Anglo-American romance of the first importance was in process of taking place, and that the canny Scot had cut out a host of rivals for Sadie's affections.

London Society itself was strongly inclined to believe it; so much so that its gilded youth showed far less eagerness than was fitting in the case of so lovely and wealthy a girl as Sadie. Joan commented on the circumstance with sisterly frankness.

"I said that you would have to marry Hamilton," she said. "But now it looks as though Hamilton would have to marry you."

CHAPTER NINETEEN.

I.

IN political as in natural meteorology there is apt to be a lull before the storm. The European world had seen the preliminary lightnings of the British ultimatum to Volscia, and now awaited breathlessly the crash of armaments. Those who were over forty thought of the agony of July 1914, when the edifice of peace came down with a run which wrapped the entire world in the flames of war. Would Europe again take fire?

The uncanny pause which often supervenes when catastrophe is imminent was on this occasion unusually prolonged. Volscia had returned no answer either to Britain or America, yet day succeeded day and nothing happened. For this there were two reasons.

Firstly, neither Volscia nor America could get at each other.

Secondly, Britain, which could attack Volscia,

held her hand because the Foreign Office knew by this time that, great as had been the Dictator's offence, France was the real villain of the piece. Andreas himself came to the same conclusion about the same time.

To Wilbraham Bright and others he had boasted that, whatever happened, France neither could nor would turn her back upon him. With French backing he counted upon support from the United States of Europe as a whole; and with Europe behind him he was confident of enforcing his demands upon America, or at least of humiliating that Power in a manner which would justify his violent policy to his own people, if not to the world.

II.

Alphonse Lefevre, the French Foreign Minister, never had intended to come to Volscia's rescue unless conditions were particularly favourable. For Martin Andreas he had a large measure of contempt, regarding him, as Bismarck once observed the late Lord Salisbury, as "a lath painted to look like iron." Lefevre had made a catspaw of Volscia, using her and her Dictator as a means of diverting attention from his own country, which was steadily increasing its hoard of gold

to the detriment of the rest of Europe. He conveniently ignored the fact that he himself and the Government of which he was a member were in their turn the pawns of vast financial interests. The influence of cosmopolitan finance upon political developments is a subject which has never received the attention it deserves. Great as it is and always has been, it had never been more formidable than it was now in France.

Hence the intimacy of the conversation which took place at the Quai d'Orsay when Andreas's S.O.S. lay on the table between M. Lefevre and Simon Grün, the eminent financier. Simon Grün was the friendly Jew who had helped Hamilton to carry off Sadie Reinhart from Regnum. Like most financiers, Jewish and other, his personality had two sides. He had his social side; a truer friend and a more charming host there was not in the whole of France. But he also had his business side, acute, resolute, remorseless. This was the side which was now turned to the Foreign Minister.

Judging from appearances, the Minister was the more forceful individuality of the two, with his shock of thick hair, his keen cynical face, his bright eyes looking through pince-nez, and his Vandyke beard. Simon Grün had small regular features, dark gentle eyes, also seen through

pince-nez, and a white moustache. He was very bald, the little hair he had being snowy white. His voice corresponded with his appearance ; it was low but clear. He never had occasion to raise it. He was able, however, to impart to it when he chose a hardness which was always sufficient for his purpose, and that purpose always was to warn his opponent that he would stand no trifling.

Lefevre handed the Jew a decoded telegram and lit a cigarette.

“ That,” he said, “ will give you the gist of what Andreas has been dinning into my ears over the telephone the whole morning. I am grateful even for an hour’s intermission, but I have no doubt he will begin again very soon.”

“ Andreas is a worse blunderer than I thought him,” observed Grün, glancing over the message.

“ For my part I am grateful that he has been sufficiently a fool for our purpose. To arrest the Englishman was, of course, a characteristic embroidery. All the same it has its advantages.”

“ It provides you with a reasonable excuse for turning him down ? ”

“ Precisely. Not that we could have joined forces with him in any case. But with Britain in the field—our old ally of 1914-18—the thing is so obviously and completely impossible that

no one but an Andreas would dream of our intervention."

"I understand that M. le Président favours the offer of France's good offices to mediate?"

"He did, but I had little difficulty in convincing him that that is out of the question. In the first place, America won't hear of it now that Britain is in with her. In the second place, if the war is stopped there is the danger of the general attention being focussed upon us."

"There will be no war," said Grün quietly.

The other smiled.

"Oh, if you say so, I suppose there won't. If Andreas were sane I would agree with you without hesitation. But he is *tête-montée* to the last degree, and he is also beginning to be frightened out of the few wits he had. He daren't go back if he would, and he wouldn't if he could."

"I think you have always been inclined to underrate Andreas. I admit he has got above himself, and that the arrest of Hamilton was worthy of Napoleon at his worst. But he is no fool, and he will find a loophole of escape before the British and Americans begin to bomb Regnum from the air."

"For the sake of Volscia, I trust you are right."

"A question that concerns us more nearly is the United States of Europe."

"That is another of the things that Andreas has been harping on to-day. He threatens to withdraw from the confederation unless he receives its support."

"If he does so, there will be other withdrawals, and several States now in the confederation will drift into the orbit of the Anglo-American alliance."

"You still think, then, that the British and the Yankees will arrive at a permanent basis of union?"

"I am sure of it. The British have plunged into the quarrel in order to catch America on the rebound. Andreas, without intending it, is serving a double international purpose—first to act as a lightning conductor to France; secondly, to cement the Anglo-American friendship."

"Even you didn't foresee the second development," said the Minister pleasantly.

"No; if I had I should have recommended France to check Andreas before he had pulled the nose of America."

"As it is, you agree that we shall be well advised to keep out of it, even if it splits the United States of Europe?"

"I think France would be mad to pursue any other course," replied the Jew.

III.

Britain's entry into the war greatly simplified the problem of President Martyr and the Government of the United States of America. It provided them with a convenient battering-ram, and it dissipated the uncomfortable isolation in which they had suddenly found themselves enveloped when Volscia struck at them. The handful of extreme pacifists who always come to the front in times of national crisis put forward the suggestion that America should retire gracefully and leave Britain to do the fighting. But this proposal was indignantly suppressed, as were the authors of it; and the Government addressed itself whole-heartedly to the task of opening up negotiations with Great Britain.

Mr Brinsmead's interview with Lord Rotherham had cleared the ground so effectively that within a week of Britain's ultimatum to Volscia a draft treaty was ready for the acceptance of the President and Congress. Its main provisions may be summarised as follows:—

An offensive and defensive alliance for a minimum period of ten years, to be automatically renewed at the end of that time

unless the treaty should be renounced by either party beforehand.

The Allies to prosecute the war with Volscia in common, peace only to be declared on agreed terms.

Britain to provide bases for the land, sea and air forces of America.

America to finance all military operations, repayments to be adjusted at the end of the war.

The Allies and their nationals to enjoy free trade in each other's territories.

President Martyr read the British draft closely, and then looked across at the Secretary of State. The two men were sitting in the President's sanctum.

"The War Debt isn't mentioned," he remarked with surprise.

"No, Mr President, they have left that to us," was the reply.

"Yes, I reckon it's up to us to do something about it," said the Chief Executive.

What he decided on was conveyed a few days later to Congress, to the nation and to the world, in the Message delivered to a special session of Congress called together for the purpose on 14th July 1941. In this Message the President made feeling reference to the violent and unlawful act

perpetrated a fortnight earlier at the instance of the Volscian Dictator.

"There is, unfortunately, a precedent for this outrage," continued the Message, "a precedent going back as far as the days of Napoleon. In that case Europe took steps to rid itself of the tyrant who had so wantonly disturbed its peace. In like manner America will not fail to exact a full retribution from the Dictator who has violated all the laws of hospitality and international comity. The Dictator of Volscia has imprisoned nearly five hundred American citizens whose only crime was that they were Americans. This outrage has been followed by an insolent demand upon America for a heavy indemnity as the price of their release.

"It is in order that I may move to the punishment of this insolent aggressor that I have summoned Congress together. The nation has demanded war, and the Government has now proclaimed it. The war will be prosecuted until Volscia sues for peace, and peace will only be granted on the terms of ample reparation, both national and individual."

The Message went on to point out the immense difficulties of making war at a distance of 4000 miles from any American base. "In fact," it bluntly admitted, "the task would have been

impossible but for the entry of a sister nation into the struggle. Not content with insulting and defying the American people, the Volscian Dictator has forced a quarrel on Great Britain, and that Power has decided to make common cause with us in maintaining international decencies, if needs be by force of arms.

“ In such a contest as this it is impossible to enforce the national will without allies. I therefore lay before Congress a draft Treaty with Great Britain for an offensive and defensive alliance covering the period of the war (which I hope will be short) and continuing for at least ten years afterwards.”

After summarising the terms of the Treaty, the President proceeded :—

“ These terms appear to me to be such as America can and ought to accept, for they do not contain a single provision that has not at one time or another received the approval of either House of Congress. If, however, there is any considerable body of opposition to them, I would simply point out in reply that these are the only terms on which Great Britain is willing to enter into an offensive and defensive alliance. And without such an alliance it is impossible for us to carry on the war which has now been declared.”

The Message went into brief detail on every point embodied in the Treaty, and dealt at greater length with the enormous advantage of providing the traders of America with a Free Trade area which would cover nearly half the earth.

"We all know," it said, "that the new federation of Europe has been brought about under conditions which may lead to a tariff war between Europe and America. Whether this eventuates or not it is certain that our trade with Europe will be very greatly handicapped. At this critical juncture the proposal for reciprocal Free Trade with the British Empire opens to us a market which, with our own population, represents a population of more than five hundred millions. American opinion has for some years been steadily trending towards the Free Trade goal. This Treaty invites us to take the first step towards it."

III.

The Message closed on a bold, not to say sensational note. The President had made up his mind on the subject of the British War Debt. It was a critical decision for him, for if he failed to carry both Congress and people with him, his career was at an end. On the other hand, the

question of the War Debt had been agitated in America almost ever since the British settlement of 1923. Not a few Americans had favoured the cancellation of all War Debts at the time, and their number had grown steadily since. President Martyr felt that now or never was a time to wipe out the British Debt. Never had there been so great enthusiasm for the British people in America. He determined to strike while the iron was hot.

"At this moment," he said, "when the two great English-speaking nations are, as I trust, about to seal their secular friendship by an offensive and defensive alliance which will operate powerfully in the interests of world peace, the time seems opportune to settle a matter that has long been a source of bitterness between them. Not that Britain has ever shown the smallest desire to escape payment under her War Debt agreement. Great Britain was the first Power to settle with us for her Debt. She is repaying us at a higher rate of interest than any other European Power, and her payments during the past twenty years have exceeded two thousand million dollars. She herself has written off all the War Debts owing to her, with the exception of a portion of the sums which she owes to America on behalf of other nations. She has stood up gallantly to these gigantic disburse-

ments, and has set an example to all the world of how a great nation honours its obligations, whatever the cost to itself.

"It must be obvious, however, that these payments have had a crippling influence upon her corporate life. I am one of those who consider that it would have been a good thing for America, as well as for the rest of the world, if all War Debts had been wiped out after the war. However that may be, I hold that the time has come to cancel the British War Debt to America. To put it at its lowest, it is a gesture reciprocal of the generous and friendly attitude of the British people at a time when such an attitude was specially welcome to us. At its highest it is a declaration that America is not isolated from the rest of the world, that she recognises the claims of kindred nations and of humanity at large."

IV.

The Message made a profound and universal impression. So far as Congress and people were concerned, it caught them exactly at the right moment. America was in the mood for almost any demonstration in Britain's favour. She had been chagrined by the apparent impunity with

which Volscia had defeathered the eagle, and the complete apathy shown by the greater part of continental Europe towards the outrage that had been offered to her prestige. Britain alone had had the decency to stand by her side. Britain alone had made it possible for her to bring Volscia to its senses. The popular gratitude was unmeasured, and the President's appeal was taken up with enthusiasm.

The Senate ratified the Treaty, and Congress sanctioned the remission of the balance of the British War Debt—some two thousand million dollars—almost in a night. The press and public applauded the decisions, and wonderful processions in many cities emphasised the popular approval. Americans the world over held their heads higher. The only jarring note was struck by 'big business.'

Under the Nineteenth Amendment the entire wealth as well as the manhood of the nation passed under conscription when war was declared. This arrangement did not suit the great captains of industry, with the notable exception of the venerable Henry Ford. It promised not only to wipe out their profits, to give away their secrets and to ruin their businesses, but it condemned them to complete idleness or, in the alternative, converted them into mere Commissars, as in

Russia. Hence they fought tooth and nail against the declaration of war. When war was entered into with the enthusiastic support of the people, they promptly took their grievance into court, and sought to show that there was no case for the implement of the Nineteenth Amendment.

Their contention was that war with Volscia was a 'limited' war against a Power small by comparison with the United States of America. It called for only a limited display of military force, and not for a draft of the entire manhood of the nation. Neither did it demand the conscription of the nation's wealth.

In view of the urgency of the occasion the case was taken up promptly, and decided by the full bench of the Supreme Court at Washington. Judgment as handed down was unanimous. It declared that the Nineteenth Amendment was operative, and that wealth as well as manhood must be conscripted. In reply to the contention that the war was about to be carried on against an inferior enemy, the Court adverted to the recently constituted United States of Europe, and pointed out that under the constitution of the new confederacy the whole continent might be called upon to aid the enemy state of Volscia. In that case it would in all probability be necessary to mobilise the entire resources of the nation.

The President would therefore be justified in conscripting the vast wealth represented by the commercial interests of the country.

Henry Ford, the mammoth motor manufacturer, now a man nearly eighty years of age, stood out from the group of disgruntled millionaires. So far from objecting to the nationalisation of his vast business concerns, he had actually anticipated the present crisis some years before. He had accordingly perfected an arrangement under which his business became automatically a State enterprise. All its departmental heads were given greatly reduced salaries, while he himself figured as a voluntary worker.

By so doing he provided the Government with an admirable working model of how to nationalise other businesses, both great and small. The Government was quick to follow the lead, with an enormous resultant saving in time and energy.

CHAPTER TWENTY.

I.

WHEN Joan Wheeler heard of the great American gesture she was old-fashioned enough to turn to Sadie and give her an enthusiastic hug.

"That's for America, darling!" she exclaimed. "I always felt sure your dear countrymen would do the handsome thing eventually."

Sadie, on her part, was also old-fashioned enough to shed tears.

"I tell you, many of us have felt mighty mean for years about that Debt," she sobbed. "All the more because none of you ever said anything. But we felt in our bones what you must be thinking of us."

"It was our own doing, Sadie, so why on earth should we have said anything about it? All the same, it's a magnificent gesture, dear, and we do appreciate generosity."

Here Joan spoke for her people. America had

kindled the British imagination at last. It must be admitted that for twenty years the British had felt sore about the American Debt. By rights that resentment should have been visited chiefly on the blundering head of the British plenipotentiary who had no business to make such an agreement. But, as often happens, it was directed mainly against the other party to the contract, and for twenty years British public opinion had looked on America as a rich and unconscionable Shylock. This view was strengthened by Britain's industrial and economic difficulties, from which she had only partially emerged even now. It had been fostered by the sensational press, and had obtained a firm hold on the popular imagination.

By a single dramatic act America had now severed the cords which bound the millstone of a gigantic debt round the neck of Britain, and had tossed the millstone itself into the Atlantic. What this would mean to America the British were in a better position to appreciate than most people, for they had sweated blood in their endeavours to redeem the rash undertaking given on their behalf. America now took the burden upon her own shoulders, to the boundless relief and gratitude of every man and woman in Britain.

The popular rejoicing was so overwhelming

that a special holiday was proclaimed. The Stars and Stripes flew everywhere side by side with the Union Jack. "The Star-spangled Banner" was played at the opening of every entertainment. Prominent Americans, especially the Ambassador and his family, were surrounded by cheering crowds whenever they appeared in public. American literature boomed. Chewing-gum threatened for a time to oust the cigarette. Even the American 'talkies' came back into favour for a season.

The official end of the business was well taken care of. The resolution of Congress was conveyed to Britain by a direct communication from the President to the King. A resolution expressing admiration and gratitude was passed by the House of Commons, after eloquent speeches by the leaders of all parties. When the question was put the members, led by the Prime Minister, sprang to their feet bare-headed, amidst cheers such as the House had seldom listened to.

A similar resolution, without any demonstration, was voted by the House of Lords. The theme was taken up by nearly every public body in the country. The churches overflowed for a week or two; pulpit and press vied with each other in their tributes to American generosity.

Continental Europe, especially France, reacted to the event as might have been expected. The

press affected to be delighted, but many of its comments were sub-acid. Britain, it was hinted, had been well rewarded for coming to the rescue of America and offering to help in the chastisement of Volscia. America, as became a business-like country, had not paid for the goods until they were delivered. The whole transaction, it was suggested, was characteristic of Anglo-Saxon methods.

Eric Wheeler smiled when the official extracts from the French newspapers were laid before him.

"Yes," he said to his secretary, "it's right and natural that France should be sick at the idea of an Anglo-Saxon alliance. It puts an end for ten years at least—I hope for ever—to her dream of dominating Europe."

II.

Wilbraham Bright was one of those people who liked being in London on a public holiday. It gave him a restful feeling to note the absence of the typical London crowd, and to see and even mingle with the throng of unmistakable visitors from the country. Hence he remained in town on the special holiday set apart to commemorate the 'great American gesture,' as the

remission of the British Debt had come to be called.

About seven o'clock in the evening he might have been seen ascending the steps of the Foreign Office, and five minutes later he was seated opposite Lord Rotherham in his room. The Foreign Secretary was overwhelmed with work, but he assumed that Wilbraham Bright must have business of importance. He looked up expectantly as the journalist came in.

Bright settled himself in his chair with his usual composure.

"Well, my Lord," he said genially, "so you have achieved your *magnum opus*—an Anglo-American alliance on terms which give us peace with honour—and profit."

"Very good of you, Bright. Yes, the great objective has been attained, and now I can sing my *nunc dimittis* at any time that it may be required of me. Any news?"

"Only the latest sensation from America."

"What is that?"

"The remission of debts."

"You can hardly call that news, Bright. It has almost ceased to be a sensation."

"On the contrary, it hasn't begun to be one."

Lord Rotherham's hazel eyes dilated.

"I believe I know what you're going to tell

me!" he exclaimed. "But out with it. I suppose I ought to have got wind of it before you. But that is the penalty of trying to run the Foreign Office. One is always the last to know what is going on."

A slight exaggeration of the facts. But Lord Rotherham hated the idea of Bright, or any other journalist, getting hold of really important news before him.

"America," said Wilbraham Bright, "has gone the whole hog."

"You mean—remitted the obligations of all her war debtors?"

"Yes."

Lord Rotherham steadied his head on his hand, and looked at the journalist with an almost dreamy expression.

"Where did you get this from?" he asked, after a pause.

"The 'Times' correspondent at Washington 'phoned through to Elles as I was sitting in his room."

Elles was editor-in-chief of the 'Thunderer.'

"He has beaten Sir Cedric Trumpington. I have heard nothing from him yet. But I was not unprepared for it. That Senator fellow—Winflete—was obviously out to trump the President's trick; and apparently he has done it. As I say,

I'm not altogether surprised, but I hardly expected our Allies to be so ultra-generous. Any details?"

"The one condition imposed is that Germany shall be relieved of the burden of reparations."

"That was to be expected. A clever and tactful discounting of what Germany would have done in any case. What more have you to tell me?"

"Senator Winflete is a tremendous orator. The Senate is not an emotional body, but he seems to have fired even the Senate by his appeal for an all-round cancellation of debts. His coadjutors in the House of Representatives probably had an easier task; and the public seem to have been worked up to a mood in which they would have agreed to anything. Rather a change, isn't it?"

"It's the first step that counts," rejoined the Foreign Minister. "Having wiped out the British Debt naturally made it easier to forgive the other European States. And the enormous revulsion of feeling in Britain may well have persuaded them that it would be good business to have a clean slate all round. By the way, what about Volscia?"

Bright smiled.

"Volscia is included in the act of grace," he replied.

"Ah!" Lord Rotherham had never made a more eloquent observation.

"I quite agree with you," said Bright. "The Yankees have come out strong at last."

"I'm a busy man," answered the Foreign Secretary, "and this development isn't going to lighten my work. But it's impossible not to sit down for a minute and think what all this means."

"It means in the first place that there will be no war after all," said Bright.

"Hardly. Andreas isn't going to refuse such a God-sent opportunity of climbing down."

"Apart from that he is an impulsive fellow; and if I know him this development will bowl him over. No one could resist such a gesture—certainly not Andreas."

"Well," said Lord Rotherham, "if America had to be generous she has chosen the second-best time for it. I don't know that she hasn't chosen the best time."

"The best time surely would have been just after the war?"

"Yes, but she wouldn't have got anything but kudos out of it."

"Whereas now—"

"She releases her nationals without having to fight for them or lowering her prestige, and

judging from our own transports she will at the same time become a first favourite with Europe."

"She scores a further point, surely?" suggested Wilbraham Bright.

"Yes, what is that?"

"No tariff war between Europe and America."

"No, of course, there won't be. There can't be if Europe feels half the gratitude that we do. And that opens up a still wider vista."

"A permanent *entente* between Europe and America?"

"Doubtless; and also inter-continental Free Trade."

Bright's eyes flashed behind his spectacles.

"Why, that would be the millennium!" he exclaimed.

"For us, certainly. For them—I mean both Americans and Europeans—eventually. You see, we have never taken kindly to Protection. We have it, but it has done us little good. Now they have been brought up on it, and at first they will feel lost without it. There will be some drastic business readjustments over the Ditch as well as over the Herring Pond. That's where we shall score."

III.

The news brought by Wilbraham Bright to the Foreign Office was confirmed a little later in the evening. America had indeed remitted the entire War Debt of Europe, and had at the same time wiped out Germany's reparation payments. Allowance having been made for her first expansive gesture, the second need not perhaps have excited so much amazement as it actually did.

The cancellation of the British Debt followed upon the sudden realisation that America stood almost alone in the world. The Volscian outrage had revealed the fact that the other States of Europe, with hardly any exceptions, were more inclined to rejoice at the discomfiture of their hated creditor than to reprehend Andreas' breach of faith. At this juncture Britain alone had taken her stand for international decency and for American friendship. The gesture called for a response in kind, and America had made it, sweeping aside, in a moment of exaltation, the calculating spirits who were asking how the resultant deficit in the national Budget was to be made up.

Then Senator Winflete, one of the most influential politicians in the Democratic Party, saw

his way to going one better than the President. Great Britain had gone into a delirium of gratitude over her unsought and unexpected deliverance. America for the first time since 1917 was a name to conjure with in the old country. Would not the cancellation of the European Debt have similar results all over Europe? America had been feeling the draught of her unpopularity for years. Now was the time to get rid of it. As Lord Rotherham had said, it is the first step that counts. Having taken so vast a stride as the cancellation of the British Debt, why not go one better, and by a further comprehensive gesture set the whole of Europe free?

Unquestionably the British response to the first cancellation operated as a powerful inducement to the second. It pointed the way to removing the incubus of veiled or open hostility which had become so common an experience of American visitors to Europe. The reactions of this hostility on trade had been considerable. These might now be expected to disappear, and what might be lost by way of Debt payments would be more than compensated for by a vastly increased volume of imports and exports.

Finally, America reckoned to lead the world—in the making of gestures as in other things. It

had irked her badly to feel, as she had felt for nearly two decades, that the world by no means admitted her claim to moral leadership. Do what she would to assert it, the weight of the Debt payments handicapped her fatally in the general esteem. The remission of the European War Debt would afford a conclusive proof that she still did things on a grand scale, and that she could do them in the grand manner. Even should American magnanimity fail to elicit any grateful response, America would feel better and bigger in her own eyes than she had felt for a long time.

Senator Winflete did not, of course, voice all this in his powerful speeches and writings advocating a clean slate for all War Debts owing to America. He dealt largely in sonorous periods which ignored the more mundane of the considerations set forth above. But they were actively present to his mind, and to the minds of the astute politicians who supported him, as well as in all probability to the public opinion which acclaimed his proposals. These were accepted by both Houses of Congress with practical unanimity, and the President was all the more willing to acquiesce in the overshadowing of his own plan because both Parties were thus committed to the principle of cancellation.

To speak of Parties in such a connection indeed

is to greatly underrate the forces which combined to bring about so unprecedented a result. It was the American nation as a whole, moved by one of those impulses which alter the course of history, and stretching out its hand in the spirit of brotherhood to the nations across the Atlantic.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE.

I.

WHEN Robert Hamilton awoke on the morning after his arrest his first impression was that he was back in India, in camp at the beginning of the hot weather. The thought made him feel wonderfully light-hearted ; to the Indian Civilian there is no country like India and no feature of the life there like camping in the jungle.

Next moment there was a reaction. He remembered that so far from being in his own tent with an interesting and busy day before him, he was a prisoner in the hands of the Volscian Dictator, interned for he knew not how long in this depressing swamp.

Then his spirits rose again. He was in the same camp with Sadie's father, for whom he had begun to entertain the feelings almost of a son—feelings only partially explained by the fact that he had never seen his own father.

He had been painfully struck by the change in Mr Reinhart's appearance the previous day. The Chicago man's optimism had received a severe shock; his idealism had been outraged. The experience had embittered him, and his face and manner suggested that his resentment was telling on his health. Hamilton felt that he must keep an eye on him if he was to be restored to his daughter safe and sound.

Springing from his sketchy bed he found that bathing arrangements were non-existent. There were a few water-taps, however, and having procured a bucket from a complaisant member of the guard, he filled it himself and performed his ablutions on the lee-side of his tent, hoping that no one of the other sex was within range. Not that anyone's susceptibilities would have been offended. Hamilton had often observed the skilful and seemly ablutions of Indians, both men and women, *coram publico*. He had wondered whether it was easy or difficult to enjoy a complete bath, as they did, without displaying any part of his anatomy. He now experimented, and although he wet most of his clothes he decided that it was worth while. A little practice, and he would be able to give lessons in it.

Petit déjeuner was served at half-past eight in three large tents, or shamianas, where all the

prisoners assembled. Hamilton drew the first blank, but discovered Mr Reinhart in the second. He was seated with Senator and Mrs Westerhout at one of two long tables, consuming indifferent rolls and coffee with an air of distaste. Coffee and bread were being dispensed from a cross table at the end of the tent. The prisoners fetched their own supplies from the end table, and carried them to the long tables to consume them.

Coming up behind him Hamilton put his hand on Mr Reinhart's shoulder. He looked round, first in amazement, then with a look of joyful welcome ; lastly with one of consternation. He held out his hand.

" Hamilton ! Back again ! Why are you here so early ? "

Seizing his hand, Hamilton saluted Mrs Westerhout and the Senator, and replied—

" I slept here last night."

" A prisoner ? "

" Yes. The Dictator feels that I have seen too much and has decided to keep me here for the present."

" I'm not surprised, sir," said Senator Westerhout in stentorian tones. " When my friend here told me that you had ventured back into Regnum I knew that you, too, would be held to

ransom. This country and its ruler, Mr Hamilton, are capable of anything."

The neighbouring prisoners, catching these words, stopped talking and looked round at the Senator. A young man who had been sitting next to Mr Reinhart rose from the table.

"Take a seat, sir," he said to Hamilton. "I'll get some coffee and rolls for you."

Hamilton protested, but the American was off to the end table, and Mr Reinhart motioned him to sit down in the vacant place.

"I'm deeply sorry, my dear Hamilton," was all he could say. He seemed thunderstruck.

"I'm not!" the Scot replied lightly. "It was a gamble, and it didn't come off. That's all."

"I am gratified," said the Senator, speaking from his wife's right hand, "that the British Government has despatched a warship to convey our Ambassador to America."

"That is so, Senator, and I can tell you another thing which I forgot to mention to Mr Reinhart last night. The British Ambassador is leaving Regnum either to-day or to-morrow."

"That's bully!" exclaimed the Senator. "And our next news, I trust, will be that England has declared war against Volscia. She must, now that one of her own nationals has been seized."

"I'm hardly important enough for that, I'm

afraid," said Hamilton. Although he had threatened the camp commandant overnight, it had never really occurred to him that his arrest could possibly rank as a *casus belli*.

"Well, sir," said Mr Westerhout, "as you have elected voluntarily to share the risks and discomforts of our imprisonment I want to welcome you, on behalf of my countrymen, to our community. Meet Mr Oscar A. Butterworth, Mr Harold B. Rickman, Mr Burton O. Slazenger"—and the Senator waved his hand in the direction of five or six Americans in his immediate vicinity. "Gentlemen, I want you to meet Mr Robert Hamilton, the gallant young Englishman who flew to Paris with the daughter of our esteemed fellow-citizen Mr Reinhart, and who has now been sent to share our captivity because he had the nerve to return with a message for her father."

Hamilton had to shake hands with all the gentlemen named, each of whom declared himself "pleased to meet you." By this time the young man who had made way for him returned with a cup of muddy coffee and an unappetising roll. He was also introduced as Mr Luke B. Stringer. He was a nice-looking lad, not long graduated from Yale. So far he regarded the whole incident as a joke.

If Hamilton had hoped to have a few words in private with Mr Reinhart he was disappointed so far as that morning was concerned. The news of an Englishman's arrest had spread all over the camp, and long before he had finished his meagre meal prisoners came up to him by the dozen and were duly introduced. He felt like sympathising with the President of the U.S.A. for the first time in his life.

II.

To his intense surprise Hamilton began to find himself a personage. The ladies especially made much of him. They thought it just too romantic that he should have snatched Mr Reinhart's daughter away from Regnum in the nick of time. His return to beard the Dictator was another point in his favour.

Where between one and two hundred American women are gathered together you may bank with certainty upon meeting dozens of charming girls. American beauty is nothing if it is not vivacious. Hamilton had to run the gauntlet of many pairs of sparkling eyes ; if his imagination were not already captive he could not possibly have come through unscathed. As it was, he found Sadie's countrywomen delightful, and their

interest in him a powerful, not to say heady, stimulant.

He also found himself very popular among the men. The American man has his romantic side, and the flight to Paris and its sequel appealed to the men prisoners. Moreover, he was the only Briton in the camp. He represented a nation which had shown its friendship for America unmistakably. It was even probable that his adventure might have had the effect of precipitating British intervention.

Apart from this, his arrival soon began to make camp life more lively, whereas the prisoners were beginning to find things very dull. At first they had not worried greatly over an imprisonment which they felt pretty sure would be of the shortest duration. The younger victims indulged in mild flirtations or played deck tennis vigorously. The elders, especially Senator Westerhout, made speeches to each other, and so the first two or three days had passed, in the circumstances, with a minimum of boredom.

Then the strain began. The utter lack of newspapers and radio got on the nerves of men and women, most of whom back home never read less than three or four newspapers a day, and who even while touring Europe were catered for by the 'New York Herald' and other papers. The

food was poor, the cookery was neither English nor American, books were un procurable, and there was not even a gramophone to dance to. Boredom speedily asserted itself, and the younger détenus were the first to become affected.

More serious trouble developed. Volscian ideas of sanitation are primitive compared to those prevailing in Britain and America. July was the most unhealthy time of the year on the drained marsh where the camp had been pitched. Its arrangements were those in vogue in nine Volscian towns out of ten—neither better nor worse. Unfortunately the authorities responsible had not given proper thought to the special problems presented by the herding of five hundred people together, many of whom were totally unused to camp life. The result was that sickness soon broke out. The Volscian doctor who had been placed in charge was both apathetic and incompetent. He prescribed quinine for the first case or two, shrugged his shoulders, and absented himself from the camp for some days.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Hamilton when he heard about it. "If any civil surgeon in India had behaved like that, he would have been dismissed the service."

The threatened outbreak of sickness and the neglect of the doctor roused the Indian Civilian

in Hamilton. He was on familiar ground. He had spent half of his district life in camp. He had to deal with epidemics of plague and cholera, and had organised a dozen anti-mosquito campaigns. He found that among the other détenus there was not a single medical man, and then he proceeded to take charge. The marsh had been drained, but there were stagnant pools in the vicinity of the camp. He interviewed the camp commandant, obtained a quantity of crude paraffin with much difficulty and proceeded to treat the pools. He demanded the issue of mosquito nets and generally improved prevailing conditions.

When the camp doctor reappeared, having himself been prostrated by fever, so he said, he found the camp and its vicinity free from mosquitoes. Discovering that Hamilton had taken the lead, he asked if he had any further suggestions to make. The Scot suggested books, games and better food, as the volumes Hamilton had brought into the camp had not gone far among five hundred people.

The food was improved, books were obtained, and football, baseball and tennis were inaugurated. A gymkhana was organised, amateur theatricals started, and the rehearsals for these kept the younger generation busy.

Hamilton gave much of his time to Mr Reinhart, who appeared to feel his position more keenly than most of the older prisoners. He constantly cursed his own folly for remaining in Regnum despite warnings, and reproached himself for the anxiety Sadie must be undergoing in her present orphaned condition. Rousing himself from these moods, he would denounce Volscian treachery with a vehemence that would have got him into trouble if he had been overheard by any of the camp officials. He reiterated his willingness to remain a prisoner all his life rather than accept liberty on the Dictator's terms. At the same time it was evident to his friends that his health was likely to suffer severely if his detention were greatly prolonged.

Hamilton observed these symptoms with growing concern, as he felt that he was responsible to Sadie for her father.

As day followed day and week followed week the task of keeping up the spirits of the prisoners became increasingly difficult. The complete absence of news was felt more and more severely. The détenus were cut off absolutely from the outside world. They had been plunged with bewildering suddenness into a vacuum, and now at the end of three weeks they were gasping for breath. One high-strung youth actually at-

tempted suicide. He was restrained, but the incident did not tend to cheer the other inmates of the camp, most of whose nerves were also pretty badly frayed.

III.

The end of the ordeal came just as suddenly as the beginning. On the twenty-first morning after the arrests the camp commandant appeared just as the prisoners were mustering for *petit déjeuner*. His face was wreathed with smiles. He entered each mess tent in turn, and announced to the startled Americans, in his perfectly correct English—

“Ladies and gentlemen,—His Excellency the Dictator is on his way to the camp. I think he has good news for all of you. Get ready, ladies and gentlemen, for—”

He beat a hasty retreat, leaving his hearers in tantalising uncertainty as to what they were to get ready for. But anything was better than the frightful monotony and the nescience of their present existence.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO.

I.

THE Governments, the people and the press of continental Europe, who had looked on with wry smiles at the spectacle of American generosity towards Britain, were now called on to readjust their bewildered faculties to a still more staggering act of grace. Of all these the conductors of the newspapers were the most embarrassed. Many of them had openly sneered at the gesture, and their remarks were on record. The Governments and the public had been more discreet. Whatever they might have thought or said, there was nothing to commit them, and no reason why they should not now give expression to their feelings.

The result was a release of pent-up emotion all over Europe, which in its magnitude, if not in its quality, went one better than the British demonstrations. True, the feelings that had

been pent up were hardly those of affection for America ; but the ecstasies in which they found expression were those of pure joy. The populace in the various countries took charge, and the Governments concerned were left more or less behind. The Governments, gratified as they were at an unexpected lightening of their problems, would have preferred to accept the gift in a calmer spirit. It was not their cue to admit that America had treated them with special generosity. To admit so much would be to give the U.S.A. a handle in future diplomatic negotiations. Politeness rather than enthusiasm was their attitude ; but their hands were forced by their less sophisticated subjects. The general rejoicing was such as to swamp the counsels of diplomacy. The various Governments were compelled, in spite of themselves, to toe the line. The press, which for its own reasons would gladly have celebrated the event in a minor key, was also swept off its feet. Nothing could modify the universal and spontaneous manifestations of delight.

When it became known that Volscia, in spite of her outrageous conduct, had not been excluded from the general act of oblivion, the magnificence of the gesture stood out in still bolder relief. The world heaved a sigh of gratification. The

spectre of an Anglo-American–Volscian war was felt to have been laid.

The peoples of France, Italy and the Balkans, distinct from their rulers, showed a reckless spirit of gratitude and delight. Germany, for her part, went wild over the prospective cessation of the reparation payments. As Lord Rotherham had shrewdly remarked, she would probably have intermitted them in any case, with or without the consent of the Powers. But to be relieved of the incubus of unlimited reparation payments without plunging the world into confusion, and without the dread of a retaliatory war, offered a way out that no one had ever dreamed of.

Germany was ready to do anything for her benefactor ; and as a first step towards marking her gratitude she threw open all her ports and markets to the free entry of American products. This meant, of course, a corresponding concession to every other country trading with Germany ; and as Free Trade had already been declared among members of the United States of Europe, the effect was immediately to inaugurate Free Trade between Europe and America.

The liberation of Europe from the burden of Debt and reparation payments gave an instant and almost violent stimulus to trade. Industry, which had languished in Europe, woke up to

renewed activity. America had been thrown back on her internal market, but now began to export on a stupendous scale. The blood of commerce began again to flow vigorously through the world's veins. Fear and distrust loosened for a time their constrictive grasp upon the nations. Of this all the world was conscious, and it also knew that it owed this freedom to the impulse which had swept over America. American stock, national, political and social, rose to unheard-of heights.

And all this sprung, as Lord Rotherham pointed out, in an access of genial cynicism, from the treacherous act of the Volscian Dictator. If Martin Andreas had not raised his hand against his American visitors, if Britain had not sprung to the side of America, if America had not been carried away by this sequence of events, if the cancellation of the British Debt had not been followed by the general acquittance—Europe and America might still have been glaring at each other across the Atlantic in preparation for a devastating war of tariffs which must have led to a still more devastating clash of armaments.

"When the tumult and the shouting dies," was his further comment, "Europe and America should combine to erect a statue to Martin Andreas, the great Peacemaker of the world!"

II.

Whether the Volscian Dictator himself ever realised the good which he had done, indirectly and unintentionally, history fails to record. What is certain is that the three weeks intervening between his perfidious assault on American tourists and the publication of America's eirenicon were alike the most critical and the most miserable of his career.

The repercussions of his treachery were totally different from what he had expected. He had counted more or less confidently upon an immediate declaration of war by America which could not be implemented, but which would immediately range the United States of Europe behind Volscia. Neither of these things had happened. America had failed to declare war immediately, and the other European nations had failed to back him —this although he knew that in private they were chuckling at the back-hander which he had administered to American conceit.

Then had come the quarrel with England, precipitated, as he had to admit to himself, by his annoyance with the young Britisher who had snatched away an American heiress out of his man-trap, had made him *pro tanto* ridiculous,

and then had coolly returned to Regnum to beard him in person. That had inevitably brought Britain into the war, and with it the realisation that he was no longer invulnerable. America and Britain would join hands, and Volscia, from a military point of view, was lost.

The American embargo on remittances to Volscia was hitting him hard ; and so was the wholesale exodus of tourists of all nationalities. It came as a shock when he realised that Volscian good faith was now suspect among his allies the United States of Europe ; that it would take years before the general confidence could be restored.

When the British ultimatum was presented most men would have begun to think of peace. America might not be able to get at Volscia, but Britain certainly could ; and once it became possible to deploy America's illimitable resources, the game was up. But Andreas steadily refused to give in. Up to date his utmost effort had not enlisted the active support of any European Power, but he was confident that a Volscian-American struggle must draw in the whole of Europe, and that in the universal catastrophe Volscia would not suffer more than the rest of the world.

If his nerve did not give way, however, that of his Volscian supporters began to fail. Faction,

which had long been so quiescent that many people thought it dead, came to light again. His opponents, supposed to be in exile or in prison, suddenly appeared from nowhere, and dared to agitate against him. What was worse, they were obtaining a hearing, whereas six months ago they would have been hounded ignominiously out of every town in Volscia.

Mounted on his white horse Andreas showed himself more determinedly than ever in the great Square and on the main parade ground of Regnum. This practice of his had a twofold object—to keep up the popular enthusiasm and to enable him to feel the general pulse. The test now began to alarm him. The cheers seemed perfunctory; his oratory did not seem to go over. He doubled his guards, and his automatic now lay openly on his table as he worked.

Everybody in Volscia felt the economic strain and the general boycott. Nevertheless warlike preparations were pushed on with unceasing energy. The whole manhood of the nation was called to arms. The Fleet was mobilised and sailed from Viennaso. It returned next day, reporting that it had paraded in the Mediterranean without encountering the British Fleet. The press waxed jubilant over the achievement,

but the public failed to respond with anything like its old enthusiasm. The Dictator himself became conscious of uneasy premonitions of disaster.

Suddenly on the black and ominous horizon shone a burst of sunlight. The incredible had happened. America had stayed her hand, just as the blow of retribution was about to descend upon the guilty little country. Nay, more, she had spontaneously forgiven the whole of Europe, and had included Volscia in the general cancellation of War Debts. The magnanimity of it struck Volscia like a blow. And the most bewildered of Volscians was the Dictator.

III.

After reading the message from Paris announcing the cancellation of all War Debts, with emphasis upon Volscia's inclusion in the financial amnesty, Martin Andreas stared at his excited Secretary, who had rushed wildly into his room to hand it to him. It was seven o'clock in the morning, and the Dictator had just sat down at his table.

"This is incredible," he muttered. "Telephone

to the German and Italian Embassies for confirmation."

He remained for some minutes with his head buried in his hands, resolutely refusing to believe that news so wonderful could be true—that the disaster which had loomed so terribly over Volscia and over the world through his own headstrong enmity towards America had been averted, because what had been staged as a duel of armaments had now become a contest in magnanimity. If it was so, it meant that America won hands down. Nothing he could now do would come within many miles of her generosity ; but he rapidly thought out the best response it was possible to make.

Confirmation came through from the Embassies in the course of twenty minutes. Andreas mobilised his whole staff, and called his car. Messengers were despatched in hot haste to the six leading hotels, ordering them to reserve all their accommodation for American guests. He himself gave orders that three suites of rooms in his own Palazzo should be prepared for leading persons among the détenus.

Then he motored at full speed to the camp, arriving there about the time that the prisoners were mustering for their morning meal.

The Dictator drove up to the central mess

tent. He was in military uniform and wore his well-known cap. Descending from his car he faced the assembly of prisoners and asked in his gruff staccato—

“ Which of you gentlemen is Senator Westerhout ? ”

The Senator stepped forward and drew himself up. It was the most dramatic moment of his life, and he rose to it. Not a word did he say. Had he spoken he would have spoiled it.

Martin Andreas removed his forage cap, advanced in his turn and held out his hand.

Senator Westerhout looked the Dictator full in the face for a moment of intense silence. Then, seeing in it strong emotion and real contrition, he grasped the proffered hand. The two men held each other's hands for several seconds, as though they were posing for the cinema. No one had thought of this detail, and a scene which the pictorials would have given their eyes to commemorate was thus lost to posterity.

Andreas held Senator Westerhout by the hand while the Americans crowded round him. Then, letting it go, he turned and faced the assembly. His deep guttural tones, elevated exactly to the right pitch, penetrated to the farthest outskirts of the crowd.

“ Citizens of America,” he said, “ I appear

before you in the rôle of a penitent. I caused you to be imprisoned under a misapprehension. I thought your great country was the enemy of Europe and of Volscia. I have learned this morning that America is the generous friend of both.

"Citizens of America, your Government and Congress have liberated the whole of Europe from the bonds of indebtedness which have bound us for the last twenty years. And America has shown her greatness by including Volscia in this liberation in spite of the grave provocation which I offered her. Such generosity demands an immediate response. I have therefore come here at once to release you, and to express my profound regret for all the inconvenience and suffering which I have caused you.

"A fleet of cars will be here within the hour to convey you back to the best hotels in Regnum, where you will be the guests of the nation so long as you choose to remain in Volscia. I hope that in spite of the treatment you have received you will not leave my capital immediately. The only adequate amends I can make to you is to show you a hospitality very different from that which you have enjoyed during the past three weeks.

"Citizens of America, if you will so far honour

me I tender you my apologies, and wish to shake hands with you all."

The Dictator then advanced to Mrs Westerhout, who beamed on him and took his proffered hand without hesitation. Andreas bent over the lady's hand and kissed it. The ice was broken, and the Dictator shook hands with everybody—except Mr Reinhart. The Chicagoan merely bowed when Martin Andreas approached him, and stepped back a pace as though to emphasise his refusal.

It was the first rebuff Andreas had received, and it had its effect. The Dictator started, his sallow face became a dull red, and he bit his lips as though striving for self-control. Then he bowed coolly, and was about to pass on when his eye fell on Hamilton, who was standing beside Mr Reinhart.

Andreas' face cleared instantly, and the smile which came over it enabled the Scot to understand one reason for his hold on Volscia. It was good-natured, unaffected and irresistible.

"So you have found the young lady's father," he said. "What I have said to my American friends applies also to you. I regret your arrest and imprisonment, and I will offer full satisfaction to your country without delay."

Hamilton bowed, and did not reject the proffered

hand-clasp. While he sympathised with Mr Reinhardt's sense of grievance, he himself was too happy to bear a grudge against anyone; nor did one receive personal apologies from a Dictator every day of one's life!

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE.

I.

THE Dictator was as good as his word. In less than two hours the whole of the prisoners were settled comfortably in their respective hotels in Regnum, and each of them was submerged in a flood of telegrams, letters and newspapers which had accumulated for them. From these they learned in detail what had happened in the last three weeks ; of the shock which the assault of Andreas had inflicted on the whole world, with the exception of Russia and China ; and how near Europe and America had been to plunging into a war of mutual destruction. It was generally assumed that a struggle between Volscia and the British-American alliance would have dragged in the whole of Europe.

The disaster had now been averted by America's magnanimous attitude—at least it was hoped so. The British-American prisoners having been re-

leased, there was no *casus belli*; and the question of compensating individual victims should surely be susceptible of a friendly settlement.

"Unless, of course, we follow the generous example of Congress and waive all claims to compensation," said Hamilton to Mr Reinhart.

The American smiled. He had almost recovered his normal cheerfulness.

"So far as I am concerned the thing is easy," he replied. "But there are a number of poor Americans in our company whose schedules have been badly upset by this nonsense. They should receive material as well as moral satisfaction."

In the course of the morning every ex-prisoner in Regnum was visited by a Volscian officer.

"His Excellency the Dictator hopes that you are comfortable," he said in each case, "and desires to know if there is anything he can do for you."

"The only thing I desire," said Mr Reinhart, "is the immediate return of my passport, as I must leave Regnum to-night for Paris."

The soldier's face fell, but he saluted and intimated that the passport would be instantly forthcoming.

"You will go with me, Hamilton?" said Mr Reinhart, turning to the young man.

"Delighted, as far as Paris."

"Why? Aren't you going back home?"

"In a day or two, Mr Reinhart. I'll follow you."

"See here, my friend. We've spent the last three weeks together, and I reckon we haven't got to like each other any less for that experience. I want to get to Sadie, but I don't want to leave you behind. So I figure it you'll have to come with me—and you must let me find your passage money in return for your company. I'll thank you, captain, to procure this gentleman's passport also. He too will be leaving Regnum to-night."

Hamilton required no further pressing to accompany Sadie's father. He only hoped Sadie would not mind any more than he did.

Regnum had informally declared the day a public holiday. All the shops and offices were closed and the whole population were out in the streets, which were gay with flags and bunting. Enormous quantities of confetti had been released, and the streets, to say nothing of the people, were gradually being snowed under.

Mr Reinhart and Hamilton went out by themselves in the course of the afternoon. They were immediately identified as Americans, and found themselves surrounded by cheering crowds, smothered by confetti, and liable to be kissed or embraced by hundreds of admirers. After

a very short walk they retreated to the hotel. Even there they found it difficult to shake off their followers.

"This is a big change from the atmosphere of a month ago," said Mr Reinhart.

"Yes," the Scot assented. "Don't you think the last three weeks were almost worth it?"

"You had better put that question to Senator Westerhout," was the reply. "He is now the Dictator's guest up at the Palazzo, and can interview him to his heart's content."

II.

They reached Paris next morning, to find themselves once more the centre of admiring demonstrations. The station officials could not do enough for them, and would hardly accept a tip. They taxied without delay to Le Bourget. They had secured two or three newspapers with some difficulty on their way across Paris; for here, too, the holiday spirit was still general, and there was a run upon the kiosks. The newspapers had rejected every other topic for the happy issue of the Americo-Volsclian imbroglio. They starred the Dictator's apology to America

and Britain, which had been wirelessed all round the world the previous evening.

The Volscian ruler, who never did things by halves, had expressed frank and unqualified regret for his ill-considered attack upon the liberty of the American tourists. He added, as he had told the prisoners themselves in the morning, that he had been prompted to it by the mistaken belief that America was a hostile creditor who could be moved in no other way. This belief had been completely shattered by her unparalleled generosity towards the whole of Europe, and especially to Volscia. Such magnanimity left him no alternative but to set his prisoners immediately at liberty, to make up to them by every means in his power for what they had suffered, and to tender ample pecuniary compensation to them.

The apology to Britain was in similar terms, and Hamilton felt extremely uncomfortable to see his name figuring as the star of an important historical document.

"I wonder what the Volscians think of their Dictator," he said, after reading through the story.

"They think, in Shakespeare's words," answered Mr Reinhart—

" 'A peace is of the nature of a conquest,
For then both parties nobly are subdued,
And neither party loser.'

"Andreas has saved his skin and their face by his apology. For as it is a reference to my country's gesture, it is something less than a climb-down; and as America can't and won't after all this exact any monetary penalty for all we have been through, Andreas and the Volscians get off scot-free."

"America then won't take him at his word?"

"And spoil the effect of what has just gone before? No, Hamilton, we can't do that. But the Ambassador should make private representations to Andreas to compensate the poorer détenus out of his own pocket—or, rather, out of Volscia's."

"Anyhow, there will be no war," said Hamilton.

"Thank God for that," was the reply.

III.

They flew from Le Bourget in the *City of Gloucester*. Mr Reinhart wirelessed to Sadie immediately before they started. It did not give her much time to get down to Croydon; but she managed it, and was waiting to meet them.

She found herself once more, to her amusement and annoyance, in the midst of a crowd of newspaper people and photographers. Of course they

noticed her, and she had to submit with little grace to the clicking of cameras and the whirr of the cinema operators while she waited for her men-folk—*her* men-folk—to arrive. She thought of Hamilton like that now, and did not mind owning it to herself.

She saw her old enemy of the 'Whirl,' but was not molested. Stray scraps of conversation were wafted to her from the press group, and as she caught them she smiled. Neither her father nor Hamilton—especially Hamilton—had the least suspicion of the ordeal that was before them. For she gathered that Hamilton was the hero of the present occasion—the Englishman who had bearded the Dictator of Volscia and had nearly caused a war. Remembering her own experience she pictured Hamilton's bashful agony when he found himself the centre of attention from a round dozen of reporters, correspondents, photographers and cinema operators.

As it happened, however, she missed the first part of this performance. At the sight of her father she forgot everything else, and rushed at him as he descended to earth. She shed a few most unmodern tears when she noticed how pulled-down he looked. She kissed him with an entirely old-fashioned fondness, and asked him the most unnecessary questions, ignoring the fact that he

was perfectly happy at the sight of her again, and that his thinness was due solely to three weeks of Volscian prison cookery.

Having satisfied herself on these points, she suddenly remembered Hamilton and looked round. The Scot was nowhere to be seen. The newspaper crowd had thinned noticeably, but there was still a group which, having photographed and cinematographed the father and daughter in each other's arms, now surrounded Mr Reinhart and plied him with questions.

Mr Reinhart, as became a good American, submitted to the ordeal with exemplary patience. Then he looked round again for Hamilton.

"Mr Hamilton took to his heels," explained one of the reporters, grinning. "I never saw anyone look so scared as when we opened fire on him. One or two have followed him, but I doubt whether they have caught him."

The unfortunate Hamilton had in fact been tracked down by the cloakroom; and when Sadie and her father came up, he was submitting to being snapped and cross-examined with the best grace he could muster.

He raised his hat on seeing her, and made a step towards them, evidently in the hope that his tormentors would take the hint and depart. But they closed round him more determinedly

than ever, while Mr Reinhart and Sadie remained standing on the edge of the crowd.

At last it was over, and the press-gang disappeared. The three were left alone, or almost alone, in the midst of the baggage. Hamilton raised his hat again, and Sadie and he advanced to meet each other, she holding her father by the arm.

"Sadie," said Mr Reinhart, putting her hand in Hamilton's, "I want you to love this good friend of mine for my sake."

Hamilton seized both her hands, and they looked each other long and steadily in the face. His was pale and questioning. Sadie smiled like the morning, and, bending forward, kissed him.

"Dad," she said, turning to her father, "I reckon I'm going to love him for his sake and my own."

The next move was Hamilton's, and Mr Reinhart turned discreetly away.

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